

FEATURING MAGIC: THE GATHERING® CARDS IN FULL COLOR

MAGIC

The Gathering®

Advanced Strategy Guide

For Advanced and Expert Magic® Players

Features cards and strategies
for high-level and
tournament play



MARK JUSTICE

1995 US MAGIC: THE GATHERING CHAMPION
WITH TIM DEDOPULOS

MAGIC

The Gathering[®]

Advanced Strategy Guide

THUNDER'S
MOUTH
PRESS 

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Foreword

How does a good **Magic** player become a great **Magic** player?

You can sum up the answer in one word: experience.

It takes hundreds if not thousands of hours of play to gain the experience needed to do well at the highest levels of play. That is what makes this book so fascinating to me. Pro Tour veteran Mark Justice has taken those thousands of hours of experience and condensed them into a 128 page book. By reading and understanding this book you can cut down on the amount of time required to become a great **Magic** player.

Don't be deceived, it will still take a bit of time and a lot of hard work.

However, this book gives you key insights and strategies that are used by the top players.

I wish there was a book like this available to me when I started playing **Magic**.

If there was, maybe I wouldn't have lost to Mark at the 1995 US Nationals.

A word of caution. This book is not for the beginning player. If you are new to **Magic**, you might like to try the *Magic: The Gathering Official Strategy Guide* by Beth Moursund. However, if you are winning your local tournaments but are having trouble at larger tournaments like the Pro Tour Qualifiers, this book just might be the key to unlocking your **Magic** success. Enjoy.

Henry A Stern

(WotC Magic R&D, and former Pro Tour Player)

INTRODUCTION

BY MARK JUSTICE



Magic: The Gathering has been a phenomenal success. In the five or so years since its release on August 5, 1993, billions of cards have been sold, in nine different languages worldwide, to millions of players.

In fact, **Magic** is one of the fastest-growing games of all time. Mensa, the international high IQ society, consider it one of their top five mind games. It's a game that rewards skill, dedication and application. The very best players are the ones who know how to build good decks, practise faithfully, and can play every aspect of the game – including the psychological.

One of the most important aspects of top-level **Magic** play is having a superb deck. There's no substitute for it. No matter how well you know the rules or how canny an opponent you are, if your deck is inferior, you will lose. The main focus of this book is therefore on deck design —current champion decks, techniques that will help make sure your own decks are as good as they can be, and methods to make sure that you can assemble the best possible decks in limited environments. You don't need tens of thousands of cards to take on the world — just seventy-five, carefully selected.

The ultimate test of playing skill is to be found at tournaments. You won't know most of the people you're playing. You certainly won't know what decks they'll have —





but they'll be good. You're also playing for a prize. Playing for fun is superb, but the extra edge of competition you get when there's something definite at stake is without parallel. The ultimate goal for every serious **Magic** player is to get to, and do well in, the Pro Tour and the World Championships. Anyone can do it — as long as they are prepared to put in the work involved. If you want to become a truly advanced **Magic** player, a professional, then this book will help.

The first chapter takes a brief look at some of the cards and rulings that have had the greatest impact on the game. The key points of **Magic** history are illustrated here, along with some of the decks that made the biggest impact in the game at the time. The second chapter then follows this up with a look at the world-beating decks in play at the moment. The top decks in the game at the moment are here, along with notes on the history and development of that deck type, and information on its strengths and weaknesses. Whether you're playing with it or against it, there's material here to help.

One of the most important elements of **Magic** is that the game is constantly evolving. Every new expansion holds the potential to revolutionise the game. Chapters three and four deal with the crucial art of constructing superb decks. In chapter three, the principles of deck construction cover all the necessary aspects of creating decks of the very highest quality. Chapter four lists the best cards currently available in the Standard (Type II) environment at the time of going to print, and uses a detailed assessment of *Stronghold* to show how to evaluate future expansions, so that you can find the more powerful cards for your decks, and stay ahead of the rest.

Chapters five and six examine the limited environment — Sealed deck and Draft. In both of these formats, knowing the tricks of deck assembly and construction is absolutely vital if you are to have a chance of winning. There are different knacks to the different formats, and they're listed here. Finally, the seventh chapter reveals the secrets of success in a tournament environment, the art of playing without playing. It also shows you some of the tricks that you might just be unfortunate enough to come up against, if you meet one of the few unscrupulous players, and tells you how to develop that all-important routine for playing perfect **Magic**.

This book contains all the tools you need to elevate your game to the point of mastery. **Magic** is the most fascinating and exciting game of the 90s, and anyone has the potential to be a truly great player. All it takes is the know-how, and some effort. You are holding that required expertise in your hands right now. All that's left is to put it into practice. Good luck, and hopefully we'll meet in battle at a tournament some day.



The Evolution of the Magic Environment

I have often thought of **Magic** as a competition between artists. Each artist brings their creation to the field of battle, and the art decides the outcome. That is one of the reasons that I play **Magic**, so I can test my wits, creativity and intelligence against another human being, to see on a given day who needs to go home and refine their creation a little more. No place is this tested better than in the constructed deck environment.

Currently, in constructed deck, there are several tournament-legal formats: Classic (Type I), Classic Restricted, *Ice Age* Block, *Mirage* Block, *Tempest* Block, Extended, and Standard (Type II). Most of the principles that we will discuss apply to any environment that you are working on, even if it is a Mono-green/artifact only tournament.

When I first began playing **Magic**, constructed deck tournaments were all that existed. In fact, all we had was what we now refer to as the Classic or the Type I environment. Moxes hit the boards, Mind Twists decimated hands, and Chaos Orbs literally flew everywhere. It was a fun time, full of turn one kills, but it was not the refined **Magic** scene that we have now. In the spring of 1995, Wizards of the Coast informed the **Magic** community that a new type of **Magic** was going to be played at the Regional, National and World tournaments. It was going to be called Type II, and it would consist of only the most recent sets. This was received with mixed emotion from the **Magic** community, as are most changes in life. I approached it with the same attitude that I have all changes in **Magic** – just tell me what cards I can use to build my decks, and I will be ready.

At the US Nationals that year, most players that were competing had been very proficient in the



Some of the classic **Magic** cards — competitively you can only use them in a type I tournament environment

Henry Stern's 1995 National Finalist Deck

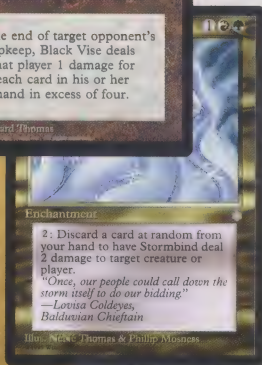
- 4 Karplusan Forest
- 7 Mountain
- 4 Strip Mine
- 2 Dwarven Ruins
- 7 Forest
- 4 Lightning Bolt
- 3 Incinerate
- 4 Fireball
- 1 Channel
- 4 Black Vise
- 4 Howling Mine
- 3 Stormbind
- 3 Zuran Orb
- 2 Llanowar Elves
- 3 Orcish Lumberjack
- 2 Whirling Dervish
- 2 Orgg
- 1 Shivan Dragon
- 2 Jokulhaups
- 1 Crumble

Sideboard

- 2 Whirling Dervish
- 3 Pyroclasm
- 2 Llugoyf
- 3 Pyroblast
- 3 Anarchy
- 2 Crumble



A selection of the most notable cards from Henry's 1995 Vise Age deck



another card to protect you, rather than have a Zuran Orb in the deck. Even I, going into the tournament, thought

Zuran Orb was a card of questionable value. Those that were able to sum up the field and make the adjustments did well, while those who didn't had dismal showings. Being able to evaluate an environment will be discussed later.

Two decks stood out on this tournament. One stood out because of how it used Black Vise, and the second because of how it foreshadowed an age of Magic to come. The deck that best used Black Vise was aptly named the Vise Age. Played by Henry Stern, who took second that year at the Nationals, it used Four Black Vises and four Howling Mines to keep both Black Vises hurting, and fast, efficient green and red creatures. He also had three Zuran Orbs in the deck, which decided the outcome of many of the games.

The second deck represented four of the decks in the final eight. These decks were fast, using the most efficient creatures in the game and discard for great card efficiency. The decks were Mono-black with Hymn to Tourachs, Hypnotic Specters, Black Knights, Mind Twists and Nevinyrral's Disks. While only one of

Type I environment, where Blue/White had dominated. Slow, methodical, and patient described the best Type I players, and Type II was going to be a rude awaking for them. Two cards defined the tournament – Black Vise and Zuran Orb. Some players adjusted, but some were not able to. I remember several conversations, where some of the top players in the world argued the validity of Zuran Orb. All were in agreement as to the potency of Black Vise, but many argued that you should simply have

them made the US National team that year, the deck type would rear its head again in a few months. I was able to win this tournament, beating Henry Stern in the finals.

Mark Justice's 1995 US National Championship Deck

- 4 Whirling Dervish
- 2 Lifeforce
- 1 Shivan Dragon
- 1 Orgg
- 4 Incinerate
- 4 Lightning Bolt
- 2 Black Vise
- 1 Ivory Tower
- 4 Strip Mine
- 1 Jothull Wurm
- 2 Zuran Orb
- 1 Channel
- 1 Tranquility
- 2 Pyroclasm
- 1 Timberline Ridge
- 4 Crumble
- 4 Fireball
- 4 Karplusan Forests
- 8 Mountains
- 8 Forests

Sideboard:

- 2 Pyroclasm
- 2 Earthquake
- 1 Rack
- 1 Hurricane
- 2 Lifeforce
- 2 Tranquility
- 1 Jayemdae Tome
- 2 Disrupting Scepter
- 2 Shatter

The Worlds came a month later, and we saw more of the same. The final four at the Worlds that year were Henry with his Vise Age deck, myself with a Black Vise/mono-red control deck, Marc Hernandez of France with a Black Vise/Winter Orb deck, and eventual world champion Alexander Blumke with a black deck that had a small amount of white for Disenchants and



Key cards from Mark Justice's scary 1995 U.S. championship-winning deck

Balance. This would not be the last time a heavy black deck won a tournament over the next year.

Black Vise was then restricted in tournament play, and a card emerged in 1996 that changed the **Magic** tournament scene again. The card was Necropotence, and it supercharged the Mono-black discard decks to become the most talked about card in 1996. There were arguments about whether the Strip Mines, Hymn to Tourachs, or Hypnotic Specters were the actual culprits, but "Necro" decks dominated the year, winning thousands of smaller tournaments, the US Nationals, Pro Tour Dallas, and placing second at the World Championships.

In 1997, we saw a much more balanced field. There were three major tournaments during the year that were constructed deck. The first was in Paris, where a combination-oriented deck won its first major tournament. Capable of killing by turn three, the Prosperity/Cadaverous Bloom combo deck (known as Prosperous Bloom) made

Paul McCabe's Pro-Tour Dallas Necropotence Deck

- 3 Contagion
- 4 Dark Ritual
- 2 Demonic Consultation
- 4 Drain Life
- 1 Hymn to Tourach
- 4 Hypnotic Specter
- 1 Ihsan's Shade
- 2 Mind Warp
- 4 Necropotence
- 2 Sengir Vampire
- 3 Stupor
- 1 Ivory Tower
- 4 Nevinyrral's Disk
- 1 Serrated Arrows
- 1 Zuran Orb
- 2 Lake of the Dead
- 2 Mishra's Factory
- 1 Strip Mine
- 18 Swamp

Sideboard:

- 1 Contagion
- 4 Dystopia
- 3 Infernal Darkness
- 1 Soul Burn
- 3 Stench of Decay
- 1 Stupor
- 1 Lodestone Bauble
- 1 Serrated Arrows



One of the most successful Necro decks was Paul McCabe's



Mike Long's Pro Tour Paris Prosperous Bloom Deck

- 3 Bad River
- 4 Cadaverous Bloom
- 1 Drain Life
- 1 Elven Cache
- 1 Emerald Charm
- 7 Forest
- 4 Impulse
- 4 Infernal Contract
- 5 Island
- 2 Memory Lapse
- 4 Natural Balance
- 1 Power Sink
- 4 Prosperity
- 4 Squandered Resources
- 6 Swamp
- 1 Three Wishes
- 4 Undiscovered Paradise
- 4 Vampiric Tutor

Sideboard

- 3 City of Solitude
- 4 Elephant Grass
- 1 Elven Cache
- 3 Emerald Charm
- 1 Memory Lapse
- 1 Power Sink
- 2 Wall of Roots

its emergence onto the Magic scene. Combination decks had usually been scoffed at by advanced players until the 1996 National, when Turbo Stasis hit the tournament and placed two decks in the final four. The Pro Tour Paris in 1997 made it clear that combination decks could be deadly if put in the hands of an advanced player. They dominated the final sixty-four of the tournament, and placed three decks

in the final eight. I know how difficult this deck was to play against, as I played against it in the quarter finals and semi finals, before eventually losing to Mike Long's version in the finals.

Justin Gary's 1997 US National Championship Deck.

- 1 Air Elemental
- 2 Binding Grasp
- 4 Counterspell
- 4 Dissipate
- 4 Force of Will
- 4 Man-o'-War
- 3 Rainbow Efreet
- 3 Disintegrate
- 3 Earthquake
- 1 Frenetic Efreet
- 2 Incinerate
- 3 Wildfire Emissary
- 2 Nevinyrral's Disk
- 2 Serrated Arrows
- 11 Island
- 8 Mountain
- 4 Thawing Glaciers

Sideboard

- 3 Anarchy
- 2 Energy Flux
- 2 Hydroblast
- 1 Incinerate
- 1 Mind Harness
- 3 Pyroblast
- 1 Pyroclasm
- 2 Shatter

The addition of the Paris Mulligan — where anyone can take one or more mulligans before the start of any match, in return for drawing one less card per draw — has been a strong addition to the game. One of the best recent users of this was Justin Gary, the 1997 National Champion, who took a mulligan whenever he didn't have a Thawing Glaciers in his opening hand.

Justin Gary's deck relied so heavily on Thawing Glaciers that he was prepared to handicap himself with less cards in his opening hand to obtain one



He realized that the Thawing Glaciers was very important to the development of his deck, and so he was willing to sacrifice a few cards to get it in his opening hand.

The World Championships that year saw one of the most diverse Type II fields in the history of the game. Necropotence, Counterpost, Prosperous Bloom, Five Colors Green and Black, Buried Alive, and even decks without cute names scattered the field. The field was so balanced that Jakub Slemur, the current world champion, went 3—4 in Type II during the tournament before winning all three matches in the final eight.

The Extended environment was created at this time, and made its debut at the Worlds. Pro Tour Chicago was the first major tournament ever to have Extended as its main component. Those

Jakub Slemur's World Championship 1997 Five Colors Black Deck

- 4 Black Knight
- 4 Choking Sands
- 4 Contagion
- 2 Earthquake
- 4 Fallen Askari
- 4 Incinerate
- 4 Knight of Stromgald
- 4 Man-o'-War
- 1 Necratog
- 4 Nekrataal
- 2 Shadow Guildmage
- 2 Uktabi Orangutan
- 3 City of Brass
- 3 Gemstone Mine
- 2 Sulfurous Springs
- 10 Swamp
- 1 Underground River

- 3 Undiscovered Paradise

Sideboard

- 2 Disenchant
- 2 Dystopia
- 2 Ebony Charm
- 1 Exile
- 2 Forsaken Wastes
- 1 Honorable Passage
- 2 Hydroblast
- 3 Pyroblast

who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it, and a deck centered around Necropotence won again. With Strip Mines and Hypnotic Specters banned it did not dominate as it had before, but it was still strong enough to have over twenty Necro decks make the final day.



Randy Buehler's variation of Necropotence took on and beat all comers at Pro-Tour Chicago



Randy Buehler's Pro-Tour Chicago '97 Necropotence Deck

- 4 Demonic Consultation
- 3 Disenchant
- 4 Drain Life
- 2 Firestorm
- 4 Hymn to Tourach
- 1 Ihsan's Shade
- 2 Incinerate
- 4 Knight of Stromgald
- 4 Lightning Bolt
- 4 Necropotence
- 4 Order of the Ebon Hand
- 3 Gemstone Mine
- 3 Lake of the Dead
- 2 Bad River
- 4 Badlands
- 4 Scrubland
- 8 Swamp



Sideboard

- 2 CoP: Black
- 1 Disenchant
- 1 Firestorm
- 3 Honorable Passage
- 2 Mind Warp
- 3 Pyroblast
- 3 Terror



Current Decks

Some of the key cards
from Paul Sligh's 1996
Sligh/Geeba deck

The most time consuming item in **Magic**: the Gathering is the time it takes to create decks. From conception to final tuning, the creation of a deck can literally take weeks of analysis and testing. To help you speed up this process, I have made a list of some of the top deck concepts in **Magic: the Gathering**. These decks have been used thousands of times over the years, and regularly smash new concepts. If you can understand why the deck was created, what makes the deck good, and where the deck is heading, you will be more likely to recognize great new decks when they emerge.

MONO RED

History of the Deck

The Sligh Deck — named after the person that popularized it, Paul Sligh — first made a splash at the Atlanta Pro-tour Qualifier by ending up in the final four. Through word of mouth and Internet groups, the deck's popularity swept across the **Magic** community as an answer to the vastly popular Necropotence decks of the day. The Sligh deck uses a few basic deck construction guidelines to help it achieve maximum efficiency, see Appendix I. They are as follows:

- 1** Mana curve. A true Sligh deck optimizes the mana curve by using all of its mana on every turn. This is done using a "tiered" system. There are multiple items that cost one mana, fewer that cost two, and so on. The object of the deck is to put such a level of pressure on an opponent that they will have to mount a defense quickly or lose to the onslaught that you are applying.
- 2** Offensive firepower. An average 22—28 creatures and a large dose of direct damage spells.
- 3** Environment control. The Sligh deck has effective ways to remove creature, land, and artifact threats, and has built in counters to enchantment threats.

4 No combination. There are no combos in the Sligh deck. Each card is a good stand-alone card, and any combinations that are inherent in the interactions between the cards do not detract from the general usefulness of the card by itself.

5 Consistent mana development. The Sligh deck is a mono-color deck. With the correct percentage of land, the Sligh deck is less susceptible to bad mana draws.

The current Mono-red deck in today's environment leans towards using artifacts like Cursed Scroll and Ankh of Mishra to supplement the massive amount of direct damage and small aggressive creatures. (See Appendix II for listing of current decks.)



Paul Sligh's "Sligh/Geeba" Deck, Jun '96

- 2 Dwarven Trader
- 2 Goblin of the Flarg
- 4 Ironclaw Orcs
- 3 Dwarven Lieutenant
- 2 Orcish Librarian
- 2 Brothers of Fire
- 2 Orcish Artillery
- 2 Orcish Cannoneer
- 2 Dragon Whelp
- 4 Lightning Bolt
- 4 Incinerate
- 1 Fireball
- 1 Shatter
- 1 Detonate
- 4 Brass Man
- 1 Black Vise
- 4 Strip Mine
- 4 Mishra's Factory
- 2 Dwarven Ruins
- 13 Mountain

Sideboard

- 4 Manabarbs
- 2 Serrated Arrows
- 1 Shatter
- 1 Detonate
- 1 Fireball
- 1 Meekstone
- 1 Zuran Orb
- 3 Active Volcano
- 1 An-Zerrin Ruins

Dave Price's US Nationals '97 "Deadguy Red" Deck

- 4 Goblin Vandal
- 3 Goblin Digging Team
- 4 Ironclaw Orc
- 2 Dwarven Soldier
- 4 Ball Lightning
- 2 Viashino Sandstalker
- 4 Lava Hounds
- 4 Incinerate
- 4 Hammer of Bogardan
- 4 Fireblast
- 3 Kaervak's Torch
- 4 Dwarven Ruins
- 18 Mountain

Sideboard

- 4 Anarchy
- 4 Detonate
- 4 Straw Golem
- 3 Pyrokinesis



Jeff Donais' 97 World Championship Deck

- 4 Ball Lightning
- 1 Dwarven Soldier
- 1 Earthquake
- 4 Fireblast
- 1 Forsaken Wastes
- 1 Goblin Digging Team
- 4 Goblin Vandal
- 4 Hammer of Bogardan
- 4 Incinerate
- 3 Ironclaw Orcs
- 3 Kaervak's Torch
- 4 Lava Hounds
- 18 Mountains
- 4 Sulfurous Springs
- 1 Suq'ata Lancer
- 2 Viashino Sandstalker

Sideboard

- 4 Anarchy
- 1 Ankh of Mishra
- 2 Detonate
- 1 Forsaken Wastes
- 1 Phyrexian Furnace
- 2 Pyrokinesis
- 1 Shatter
- 3 Straw Golem



... and some from Jeff
Donais' 1997 version

Weaknesses of the Deck

The biggest weakness of the Mono-red deck in today's environment is that everyone is ready for it. It has had a huge win percentage, making it the first deck that nearly everyone tests against. Even with all of the preparation, and no matter what you might have against it, the Mono-red deck can still roll over you.

NECROPOTENCE

History of the Deck

The Necro decks were waiting to be born as early as the creation of the card, but their development was hindered by the environment in 1996. Black Vise was everywhere, and it wasn't until it was

Leon Lindback Pro Tour 1 Necropotence Deck

- 4 Hypnotic Specter
- 3 Knight of Stromgald
- 4 Order of the Ebon Hand
- 4 Dark Ritual
- 4 Hymn to Tourach
- 4 Drain Life
- 4 Necropotence
- 1 Soul Burn
- 1 Dark Banishing
- 1 Dance of the Dead
- 1 Ivory Tower
- 1 Zuran Orb
- 1 Jalum Tome
- 2 Nevinyrral's Disk
- 2 Serrated Arrows
- 4 Strip Mine
- 2 Ebon Stronghold
- 17 Swamp

Sideboard

- 1 City of Brass
- 1 Safe Haven
- 1 Apocalypse Chime
- 1 Feldon Cane
- 1 Jalum Tome
- 1 Meekstone
- 2 Nevinyrral Disk
- 3 The Rack
- 1 Serrated Arrows
- 1 Ashes to Ashes
- 1 Stromgald Cabal
- 1 Torture

restricted that the deck started gaining popularity. The first Necro deck to do well in a major tournament was Leon Lindback's at the first professional tournament in New York City, early in 1996.



The essentials of a
Necro deck

There are several reasons that Necropotence decks have been mainstays over the past few years. Among them are:

1 Card-drawing ability. **Magic** is a game of numbers, and if one player can draw more cards than another then their chance of winning increases dramatically. Necropotence allows for this drawing ability without having to tie up any additional mana to activate it.

2 Early pressure. Black has some of the most efficient creatures in the game of **Magic**. Even after Hypnotic Specter left the environment, there were two sets of Knights that remained to torment opponents. These, and the addition of Nekrataal, give all-black decks a solid base to work with.

3 Early disruption. Hymn to Tourach and Strip Mine, or Stupor and Wasteland, it all amounts to the same; mass disruption in the early stages of a game.

4 Synergy. The individual cards work so well together. Nevinyrral's Disks, Drain Lives, Bottle Gnomes, etc. all form a finely tuned fighting machine.

There has been a steady evolution of the Necro deck over the years. After doing very well at both US Nationals and World Championships, Paul McCabe demonstrated that the deck could perform without four Hymn to Tourachs and four Strip Mines by winning the Pro Tour Dallas in late 1996. (See deck listing in Appendix II)

The deck continued to perform well, as Americans John Chinnock and Nate Clarke made the top eight at the World Championship in 1997 using the following:

John Chinnock's '97 World Championship "Beatdown Necro" Deck

- 4 Knight of Stromgald
- 4 Black Knight
- 4 Nekrataal
- 4 Drain Life
- 4 Coercion
- 4 Icequake
- 2 Choking Sands
- 4 Dark Ritual
- 3 Necropotence
- 4 Nevinyrral's Disk
- 2 Lake of the Dead
- 4 Quicksand
- 17 Swamp

Sideboard

- 4 Contagion
- 2 Arrows
- 1 Consult
- 4 Dystopia
- 1 Necropotence
- 2 Infernal Darkness
- 1 Mind Warp



Current versions today appear to be just as strong, which points to the viability of the concept. Whenever a deck can center around one particular card and survive many expansion sets without losing its effectiveness, you have to admire its greatness. Recent versions have turned more defensive, centering around late game kills and pure card advantage.



Some more recent embellishments to the Necro deck

Current Necro Version- "Bottle Necro"

- 3 Dark Ritual
- 4 Drain Life
- 4 Necropotence
- 3 Stupor
- 1 Agonizing Memories
- 2 Lobotomy
- 3 Funeral Charm
- 4 Diabolic Edict
- 1 Spinning Darkness
- 1 Terror
- 2 Necrosavant
- 4 Nevinyrral's Disk
- 4 Steel Golem
- 2 Bottle Gnomes
- 4 Quicksand
- 13 Swamp
- 1 Undiscovered Paradise
- 4 Underground River

Weaknesses of the Deck

There are a few fundamental weaknesses of the deck, which all center around the key component of the deck, Necropotence. Because you have to pay a large percentage of life in order to get the deck rolling, it is often susceptible to quick direct damage decks like the Mono-red decks mentioned earlier. If a Counterspell deck plays correctly, it will wait to counter the Necro, and that can often mean the game.

WHITE WEENIE

History of the Deck

The white small creature horde decks, commonly referred to as "White Weenie," have their origins in the beginning stages of **Magic**. When **Magic** was first created, the combination of Crusade and cards like Jyhad created a fun and potentially deadly deck. The deck works for several reasons:

1 Mana efficiency. This deck, unlike many decks in existence, is not as prone to bad mana draws. Nearly eighty percent of all cards in the deck can be cast for two mana or less.

2 The power of white. White has had some of the most powerful and versatile spells in the history of **Magic**. *Wrath of God*, *Armageddon*, *Disenchant*, and *Swords to Plowshares* have been staples in tournament decks for years.

3 Speed. The deck has the ability to put early pressure on an opponent which forces them to react. If the opponent ever over-extends their land to try to keep up, *Armageddon* is waiting for them.

4 Environmental choice. Because of the popularity of Necropotence decks over the past two



Some of the classic cards for a White Weenie deck

years, the White Weenie deck has emerged as a spoiler of sorts. With multiple protection from black creatures in its arsenal, it can defeat a Necro deck by simply overwhelming it.

The first person to win a Major tournament with White Weenie was Tom Champheng, who defeated me in the finals of the 1996 world championships. With 12 "protection from black" creatures at his call, he was able to swarm over my limited defenses to claim the title of World Champion. (See deck listing in Appendix II)

White Weenie has been a popular but not dominating deck in tournament play. Its best role seems to be as an environmental choice to beat certain decks.

Weaknesses of the Deck

White Weenie has always had a problem against control decks, as they are centered around a heavy defensive front that White Weenie cannot consistently break through. If played in the right field, they have the chance to do very well, as

BLUE/WHITE CONTROL

History of the Deck

Blue/White control has its origins back in Type I when Blue/White reigned supreme. The decks of the time utilized the most effective defensive spells, along with card advantage, to create a nearly impenetrable wall. Brian Weissman's "The Deck" symbolizes the day when Type I reigned supreme. The Blue/White control deck had its greatest glory days back in Type One. In the summer of 1997, there was a resurgence with the creation of Counterpost. Blue/White Control works because of:

- 1** Dominance. Counterspelling ability keeps opponent's key cards from ever affecting game play.
- 2** Persistence. The defensive nature of the deck halts many players' aggressive decks, allowing the deck the needed turns to establish itself.
- 3** Card advantage. This is achieved through cards such as Whispers of the Muse, Thawing Glaciers and Kjeldoran Outpost.

Weaknesses of the Deck

There is a lack of top quality blue/white control decks today. The strategy is very fragile, and requires the right cards to make it efficient. The removal of Kjeldoran Outpost and Thawing Glaciers have left the blue/white decks in a state of flux in the current field. It will only be a matter of time before they are revived again, as most top players love to play control-oriented decks.

SUMMARY

These are only a few of the concepts that exist in **Magic** today. With each new set, some decks will be strengthened and others weakened. It is the process of determining what strengths and weaknesses each deck has as time progresses that makes **Magic** such an alluring game. For more tournament decks, see Appendix II.

Brian Weissman's "The Deck", Dec '95

- 2 Serra Angel
- 4 Mana Drain
- 2 Counterspell
- 1 Time Walk
- 1 Timetwister
- 1 Ancestral Recall
- 1 Braingeyser
- 1 Recall
- 4 Disenchant
- 4 Swords to Plowshares
- 2 Moat
- 1 Demonic Tutor
- 1 Mind Twist
- 1 Regrowth
- 2 Red Elemental Blast
- 2 Disrupting Scepter
- 1 Jayemdae Tome
- 1 Ivory Tower
- 1 Mox Jet
- 1 Mox Sapphire
- 1 Mox Emerald
- 1 Mox Ruby
- 1 Mox Pearl
- 1 Black Lotus
- 1 Sol Ring
- 2 Strip Mine
- 1 Library of Alexandria
- 3 City of Brass
- 1 Plateau
- 1 Underground Sea
- 2 Volcanic Island
- 4 Tundra
- 3 Plains
- 4 Island

Sideboard

- 1 Plains
- 1 Disrupting Scepter
- 1 Jayemdae Tome
- 1 Tormod's Crypt
- 2 Control Magic
- 1 Counterspell
- 2 Blood Moon
- 3 Circle of Protection: Red
- 2 Divine Offering
- 1 Moat



Champheng demonstrated in 1996. Because the deck has no real drawing mechanism, it will remain an environmental choice only for some time to come.



The Principles of Deck Construction

Everyone wants to improve their game. There are decks out there that I could list which would immediately increase your winning percentage. In fact, several of them have been detailed in the two previous chapters, and you'll find a few

more in



Appendix II, too. Far more important though is learning what principles are involved in creating top decks. Simply listing a couple dozen of the current tournament-beating decks would only be a short term solution. For constructed deck play, good deck design is perhaps the single most important aspect of becoming an



Knowing when to play a specific card can mean the difference between winning and losing

advanced **Magic** player. It is far better for you to master the art of making your own — that way, you won't be lost when the next expansion comes out.

There are ten principles that I live by when it comes to building the deck I am going to play in a tournament. Ignore any one of these, and you will find that your life as an advanced **Magic** player is tricky at best. Forget more than one, and you'll find that you have real difficulty winning games. If you want to have a chance of doing well in a tournament, you will need to follow these principles carefully. Otherwise, your deck is going to have serious weaknesses which smart opponents will be able to use against you.

One: Use good cards

Doesn't this seem simple enough? Play with poor cards and you tend to lose games. Play with good cards and you tend to win more games than you lose. To be competitive, you have to be aiming for a victory. That means you need to recognize what makes a card good. This is often subtle, and, of course, subject to opinion. The first basic rule, however, is to play with cards that give you an advantage over your opponent.

Every time an environment changes, I make a list of cards that I feel should be considered for that environment – you'll see the list later, in the chapter on evaluation. I can't emphasize the importance of this enough. If you lay a first turn Blood Pet, it might be good for a turn or so. If you lay a tenth turn Blood Pet, it may never do anything. If you lay a second turn Black Knight, it will almost always do something for you. The same Black Knight is not going to lose much effectiveness as the game progresses. Use the principles outlined in the chapter on evaluation when choosing cards for an environment. Remember this rule: don't play serious games with bad cards.



Two cards that can have a drastic effect on a game

TWO: Balance your mana

Beginning players often approach me with their decks for evaluation. They want me to look at it and see if I have any tips for them. The first place I look is their mana base, as this is the place where most players make fundamental errors. Either they play with too much mana or too little. Sometimes they do not have the right color balance if they are playing a multi-color deck. Other times their choice of land is simply wrong. They are playing Mana Roulette — sometimes it will work well, and sometimes it will be disastrous. Whatever the reason, if your mana base is off then you will lose games in a tournament because of it. There are a few steps that you can follow to build a solid mana base.

First, you need to recognize how much mana you need in relation to the casting cost of your deck. The three graphs in Appendix I, devised by Henry Stern, represent what you can expect statistically, based on the amount of mana you have in your deck to the amount you will draw on average by each turn.



Some Mana producing cards for more specialist decks.

Five color decks have been popular in recent times because of the many sources of multicolored mana that there are in the environment. City of Brass, Undiscovered Paradise and Gemstone Mine all provide one of any colored mana you desire. Along with the multi-lands from *Fifth Edition*, a player really is not limited in their deck choices by constraints on mana. Below is an example of a five-color deck from the regionals last year where the Five Color Green decks made their debut. Another good example is Jakub Slemur's World Championship deck, listed on page 17.

5 Colors Green	
4	Quirion Ranger
4	Granger Guildmage
4	River Boa
4	Whirling Dervish
1	Karoo Meerkat
2	Jolrael's Centaur
3	Maro
4	Birds of Paradise
4	Incinerate
4	Arcane Denial
2	Terror
2	Armor of Thorns
2	Disenchant
1	Armageddon
3	Winter Orb
4	Undiscovered Paradise
3	City of Brass
9	Forest
Sideboard	
4	Hydroblast
4	Pyroblast
2	Gloom
2	Terror
1	Disenchant
2	Simoon

This is an extreme example of a deck that uses very little mana but has supplemental mana



Some very effective low-cast spells



sources that keep it running. The danger in this is that all of your opponent's creature control now doubles as land destruction. Even with this downside, I feel these decks are going to be around for a great while. Land cards such as Undiscovered Paradise, Gemstone Mine, and the Multilands from *Tempest* give a player a wide array of choices.

At the same time, one deck that did incredibly well had almost twice the normal amount of lands. The deck was CounterPost. Relying on Thawing Glaciers to produce large amounts of mana and increase the quality of draws, CounterPost became a regular at tournaments in

1997. When asked why I play four Thawing Glaciers in my CounterPost deck, I respond "Because I can't play five."

Jon Finkel's "Finkel-Post"	
4	Counterspell
3	Force of Will
3	Power Sink
2	Recall
4	Swords to Plowshares
4	Wrath of God
3	Disenchant
1	Balance
1	Fireball
2	Stone Rain
1	Feldon's Cane
1	Zuran Orb
4	Thawing Glaciers
4	Kjeldoran Outpost
1	Strip Mine
4	Mishra's Factory
2	Adarkar Wastes
2	City of Brass
2	Mountain
6	Plains
6	Island
Sideboard	
2	Circle of Protection: Red
1	Disenchant
3	Divine Offering
2	Feldon's Cane
2	Stone Rain
3	Circle of Protection: Black
2	Circle of Protection: Green

The correct amount of Mana to play varies from deck to deck, according to the casting cost of items in your deck. Conventional wisdom dictates using around 23—25 total mana producers. Fellwar Stones, Medallions, Diamonds, and Birds of Paradise all fall into this area. When making the final decisions on your mana base, ask yourself the following questions:



Joe Finkel's Finkel-Post uses all of these cards to good effect



1 If I am playing more than one color, do I have more spells in one of the colors that require two or more mana of a specific color in their casting cost? If I do, I should probably tilt the percentage of the deck to that color.

2 If playing a Mono-color deck, what speciality lands — such as Quicksand or Wastland — could make my deck more versatile?

3 In play testing, am I having trouble with a particular color, or not drawing enough land? Use the diagram on page 118 to help you decide whether this is an aberration, or an indication that you need to add more mana.

Three: Be able to kill creatures

Almost every deck that you play in any environment will have creatures of some kind. They will vary in color, size, and ability, but all have the same purpose: killing you. With the exception of combination decks such as TurboStasis and Prosperous Bloom, your deck must have a way to deal with your opponent's creatures. Let me rephrase that. Your deck must have multiple ways of dealing with opponents' creatures, or you will not consistently win. It is that simple.

The problem has been compounded with *Tempest* and the creation of shadow creatures. There are now creatures that cannot be blocked by conventional means. This leaves you open to problems if you are relying on creatures such as walls to handle an opponent's creatures.

What ways exist to deal with an opponent's creatures? There are two broad categories that creature elimination falls into, single kill and mass elimination. Examples of single kill cards are Incinerate, Dark Banishing, Drain Life, Pacifism, Kindle, and Diabolic Edict. These are some of the best ways to handle an opponent's creatures. They are fast, have



Six simple, but effective, ways to deal with creatures

low casting cost, and are cards that you will see in every tournament you play in.

I have always been a fan of red because of the versatility of its single kill cards. Very rarely does a pure direct damage deck do well, but often, if you have red cards as your means to kill your opponent's creatures, these "creature elimination" cards can be used to kill your opponent when the time is right. This versatility always makes red decks an object of fear.

My favorite single kill card is Nekrataal. It provides that creature elimination ability, while at the same time hanging around to whack on your opponent for a while. This card is an example of card efficiency. It leads us into an even more effective group of cards, mass elimination cards.

While single kill cards are always valued, they very rarely swing a game. What they do is allow you to survive until the game develops to a point where you can win through playing skill or deck advantage. Mass elimination cards, on the other hand, are capable of winning the game by

themselves. They give the person playing them so much advantage that they should be added when designing any deck. The three mass elimination cards that I use the most in tournament play are Wrath of God, Earthquake, and Nevinyrral's Disk. If your opponent over-extends their creature base, these cards give you the opportunity to get multiple card advantage.

Let's use an example to better illustrate this. At turn eight, your opponent lays their third creature. If they went first, then twenty percent of their entire game is currently invested in the creatures they have on the board. If you are able to eliminate these three creatures with one of your cards, representing only seven percent of your game at this point, then you have achieved a huge statistical advantage. If one type of card in your deck can provide this type of benefit, then a certain number of games will be won by simply having that statistical advantage.

Always be aware of your environment on this point, and know what creatures are being played. Are white shadow creatures popular? If so, you probably want more than just red or black creature elimination cards in your deck.



My three favorite mass-elimination cards



Are blue decks with Tradewind Riders and Man-o'-Wars out there? If so, Pacifism would be better replaced by something else. Whatever elimination cards you use, be sure that you can deal with creatures.

Four: Do not be vulnerable to one counter-spell

I have never played a combination deck in a major tournament, and I probably never will. I know of the power that lies behind the Prosperity/Bloom combination, and the frustration one can feel under a Stasis lock. I know this because I have been beaten at times by both. The reason I will never play a deck like this is that I do not like decks that are susceptible to Counterspells. A solid creature deck cannot be beaten by one counter spell. Necropotence, White Shadow, Tradewind Rider Decks, Five Colors Green, and even Mono-red decks are only annoyed by the existence of counter-spells. Combination decks, however, can be ruined by them.

This does not mean that combination decks are not viable. Besides having counter-spells of your own, there are cards that can make counter-spells less efficient in your opponent's deck.



Abyence and City of Solitude are the two best examples of these cards, as they force your opponent to counter them if they want to use their counter-spells at all this turn. Check the decks that you are playing to avoid the frustration of losing to a single card.

Five: Apply early pressure — or be able to cope with it

As **Magic** has developed, the category of cards which has grown the strongest has been creature cards. With elimination cards being able to handle creatures if they come out too late in the game, **Magic** has developed faster, quicker creatures. Creatures such as Jackal Pup, Soltari Priest, Mogg Fanatic, Muscle Sliver, Dauthi Slayer and Suq'ata Lancer join Black and White Knight, River Boa, Granger Guildmage and others to provide a deadly early attack. A Mono-red deck's first three turns can often go in the following order: turn one, Mogg Fanatic; turn two, Ironclaw Orcs; turn three, Ball Lightning. Those, backed up with whatever direct damage might be in the hand, can be deadly. Going against two White Knights backed by Armageddon — or two Black Knights backed up with Necropotence — does not give you any relaxing feeling of security. So you are faced with one of two choices, either be the one applying the early



pressure, or be sure that you can deal with it. The following Mono-red deck is a perfect example of applying early pressure:

Mono-red Speed Deck

- 18 Mountain
- 4 Wasteland
- 4 Jackal Pup
- 4 Mogg Fanatic
- 4 Mogg Flunkies
- 4 Fireslinger
- 4 Ball Lightning
- 4 Incinerate
- 4 Fireblast
- 4 Cursed Scroll
- 4 Shock
- 2 Hammer of Bogardan

Applying the early pressure can be easy. All it takes is a couple of shadow creatures on the board and you can start counting the turns your opponent has to live. If you are playing a slower deck, coming up with the right combination to deal with the early pressure can be a bit harder. Having the



cards to deal with creatures is going to be essential, but often times you need a little more. In the *Tempest*-only environment, a card has emerged that will be played in many Type II decks until the set is rotated out of the environment. This card is so versatile that you will see it in the majority of decks at the World Championships this year. The card is Bottle Gnomes.

When I look at Bottle Gnomes, I think that the card was created for this principle. It can block almost all of the early creatures that cause problems, and at the same time it serves as an emergency release valve. It replaces cards like Honorable Passage and Shadowbane in the main deck, and also provides the ability to whack your opponent for one when they are not looking. Perhaps, after Cursed Scroll, it is the best all-around card in the *Tempest* set. Whatever your inclination, do not forget this rule.

Six: Do not be vulnerable to artifacts and enchantments

Another common mistake I see mid-range players make is not being prepared for enchantments and artifacts. It amazes me when I see a Mono-red deck not being able to deal with a Circle of Protection: Red. When any player playing white — the source for destroying artifacts and enchantments — can't simply crush any deck centering around artifacts or enchantments, I am amazed. This is one of the easiest principles to follow. Make sure before you enter any tournament that you have ample ways of dealing with artifacts and enchantments. Here are some examples of ways to deal with these problems in each color.

White —

The home base for enchantment destruction. Along with the most popular card, Disenchant, is another increasingly popular card, Aura of Silence. Not only does it destroy enchantments and artifacts, but it slows down their development.



The two most popular white cards for destroying artifacts



Red — This color has no problem with artifacts, with cards like Shatter, but runs into a problem with enchantments. If Circles of protection are giving you problems, look to Hand to Hand as a solution. Nevinyrral's Disk is always a blanket solution. Most players simply minor white for Disenchant.



Black —Nevinyrral's Disk appears to be the only solid solution in this color, and when it picks your Necropotence up in the destruction process, you have an added bonus.



Dealing with it the green way — the four best options

Green — Tranquility, Tranquil Domain, Crumble, and Creeping Mold are just a few of the many ways to deal with artifacts and enchantments in this color. Uktabi Orangutan has become a popular tournament card for dealing with artifacts.



Blue brings something extra to doing your opponent out of artifacts — control

Blue —Steal Enchantment can give you an edge over your opponent, and Energy Flux can hamper your opponent if they have mass artifact plans. Most players minor white for Disenchant as well in this color if they feel that there is going to be a problem. This is a principle that will win you a few extra games when followed,

Seven: Do not suffer mid-game crisis

Mid-game crisis occurs when, in between turns ten and twenty, there seems little you can do to mount any offensive threat. A 2/2 creature is a lot more intimidating on turn two than on turn twenty two. That is when you need to pull out your Rogaine Solution to help you through the trouble.



The Rogaine Solution is a card that can give you some sort of advantage at these times. It's a card that is good at almost any time in the game, relatively early

Two of the best Rogaine solution cards

or late, but its true worth shows up in the mid-game. The most famous of these cards are the Jayemdae Tome and Library of Alexandria. In early Type I decks, these cards dominated tournaments by giving a player such a card advantage that it was nearly impossible for an opponent to come back. While the Tome is still a usable card in the Standard environment, the set of *Tempest* has given us the most Rogaine Solutions out of any set ever. The key concept is called buyback.



Buyback cards — the ultimate in recycling

Corpse Dance, Capsize, Whispers of the Muse, Elvish Fury, and Searing Touch can all be used early in a game. They are all average cards when used in a singular capacity. Their true worth starts appearing when you reach a point mid-game where you have enough mana developed to start taking advantage of their ability. There should be four Whispers of the Muse in nearly every Mono-blue deck. It provides such drawing power that one shouldn't ignore it.

The best mid-game card in a long time may be one that one can fit into any deck, Cursed Scroll. One colorless to cast, and only three to use. Capable of killing multiple creatures or damaging your opponent. Must be a card in that new

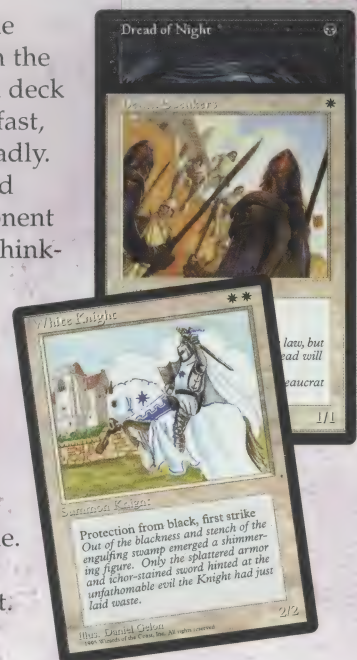
joke expansion coming up, right? The card is quite real and being played in every environment, from Type I to Tempest Block. Cursed Scroll provides a quick knock-out punch it needs, and a slow deck with the extra oomph to get it over the top. A definite boost for any weary deck mid-game.



Jayemdae Tome is superbly useful at the mid to late game

Eight: Be prepared for whatever gives your deck problems

You walk into the tournament with the best Mono-black deck in creation. It is fast, efficient, and deadly. You sit down and gaze at the opponent in front of you, thinking 'little does he know of the death that awaits him'. You have followed all the principles religiously, and are ready to do battle. Your opponent, however, has not. He happens to have every Protection from Black creature ever to



have been created in his deck, and slaughters you in game one. He has this smug look on his face while you curse under your breath, knowing he will get killed by any other deck in the tournament. This principle will save you. You knew what would give your deck problems, and so you bust out your four Dread of Nights from the Sideboard, and his creatures die as they hit the table for the remainder of the match.

One of the great things about tournament **Magic** is that each match is the best two of three and, in the finals of major tournaments, three out of five. This gives the person who is prepared a huge advantage, as the sideboard comes into play. What to put



Some essentials for your sideboard

in the sideboard, and when to sideboard each of the cards you put there is one of the hardest elements to master in advanced **Magic**.

It is not incredibly difficult to identify major areas that your deck might have problems with. Black and red decks have numerous cards that shut down their color and can thus easily identify those problems. A Counterspell deck might be slow, and therefore you would want to add Chills to slow down a red opponent. Green might fear Perish and so might have the mana situated to

bring in Mana Leaks from the sideboard. The things listed below are the most common that tournament players tune their sideboard for.

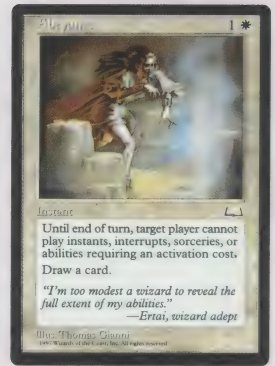
1 Ways to deal with Counterspell decks. Cards like Coercion, Lobotomy, Boil, City of Solitude, Pyroblast, and Abeyance are all good sideboard cards.

2 Additional ways to kill hard-to-deal-with creatures. Creatures like Jolrael's Centaur and Pincher Beetle can cause problems for certain decks, and extra Earthquakes and Wrath of Gods in the sideboard can also double up against mass creature decks.

3 Ways to handle enchantments and artifacts.

4 Ways to deal with direct damage. Chill, Circle of Protection: Red, Honorable Passage, and Hydroblast are popular examples.

5 Color Hosers. Perish, Dread of Night, Light of Day, Karma, and Choke are just a few examples of cards that are targeted toward a specific color. These types of decisions are made by knowing what decks are being played in your environment.



There are many things that you can do with a sideboard that can totally throw your opponent off-guard. Try having a very defensive strategy in game one, and having a sideboard that brings in creatures in game two. This will totally defeat your opponent's own sideboarding, and keep things completely confused if the match happens to go to game three. Your practice sessions should help you identify what areas you need to concentrate your sideboard slots on.

Nine: Practice, Practice, Practice

Time for a story. When I was nine, my father told me the six hundredth cliché of my young life when he said, "Mark, practice makes perfect." Having a high ambition at a young age, I took my father's words to heart. I had a Little League baseball game coming up, and we were playing for the city championship. That week, we were going to play the dreaded Pirates. The best pitcher in the league — Todd Parker, a 12 year old — was going to be pitching. I had struck out each time I had faced him during the year, and I was resolved to get a hit off of him this time. After all, if I practiced, I should be able to. I must have hit a thousand practice balls that week, and I knew I was ready for the big game. I went up to face him and dug my cleats into the dirt. I was determined that I was going to nail the ball.

I struck out three times.

Looking back on it, I felt like I had a starter deck and Todd was throwing Moxes. I am glad that I took those pitches during the week though, and I feel that part of that work ethic has allowed me to do as well as I have at **Magic**.



From Little League to Pro Tour

The difference is astonishing between a deck that you practice with and one you simply throw together and sit back with. Each game I practice might give me that extra edge needed to win a tournament. Each hour I invest might provide the knowledge of what to sideboard in a given situation. The time invested cannot be replaced by anything else.

I play **Magic** because, for the first time in my life, I have found a game that is entertaining and also makes me think every time I play it. It changes every time, and always keeps me on my toes. To stay one of the best players in the world at this game requires practice. How much? A lot. Is it worth it? It has been worth every hour I have ever put into it. The lesson here is to practice, practice, and practice.

Ten: Know your environment

In each district, for each format, three or four decks emerge as the most popular decks. These are decks that usually perform well in the area, or are decks that have done well nationally and have been posted on various Internet groups. Being aware of these decks is not only important, but essential to tuning your deck. Your deck needs to be able to do well against these decks on a consistent basis, or you shouldn't be playing the deck you are. Sometimes it will take a little research to find out what these decks are, but it is well worth the time that you invest.



What happens if your deck simply loses to one of the popular decks and no amount of side

boarding can adequately change this fact? Then you are faced with one of two choices. You can resign yourself to the fact that you are going to lose to this type of deck and defeat all others, or you can rethink the deck that you play. I have been faced with these choices several times, and I have made both decisions. There is no perfect deck, and I will always go with the deck that I feel will take me the farthest.

Principles of Deck Construction — Summary

- 1 Play with cards that are of the highest caliber.
- 2 Make sure that your Mana base is solid.
- 3 Have enough creature elimination cards to deal with varied circumstances.
- 4 Make sure that your deck is not vulnerable to counterspells.
- 5 Be able to deal with early pressure.
- 6 Be able to handle decks with artifacts and enchantments.
- 7 Have mid-game solutions to give you an advantage.
- 8 Have a sideboard ready for the decks that give you problems.
- 9 Make sure you get lots of practice.
- 10 Know what you are likely to be up against

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Let us apply these ten principles to a deck that I am thinking about playing in an upcoming Standard tournament. Through networking, I received this deck created by a friend of mine, Jon Finkle. Jon is an amazing control player, and this deck is definitely his style. The initial deck is as follows:

Jon's Control Deck

- 4 Tradewind Rider
- 4 Man-o'-War
- 4 Ophidian
- 4 Bottle Gnomes
- 4 Counterspell
- 4 Dismiss
- 4 Impulse
- 4 Whispers of the Muse
- 3 Capsize
- 4 Sapphire Medallion
- 4 Quicksand
- 17 Islands



One: Use good cards

I have made my initial list of cards for the Standard environment, and all of these cards are on it. The good thing about this list is that you

only have to do it once, and then just update it as new information comes your way. I have not made a sideboard for this deck yet, and will use the list to create the sideboard as well.

The premise for the deck is a simple one — use your effective creatures to keep the opponent at bay until you can get an advantage over your opponent with Tradewind Riders or Ophidians. The deck on first glance should give you the needed time to set up this situation, and provides plenty of card drawing mechanisms to give you that advantage. It is a solid enough deck to run through the rules and see if it passes the test.

Two: Balance your mana

The best advantage of a Mono-color deck is the lack of mana problems that can potentially develop. Seventeen or eighteen lands of the Mono-color has long been the conventional amount to put in a deck of this type. The four Quicksands provide the extra mana, while serving as a dual function, and the four Sapphire Medallions can help your long term mana development. They make a nice addition to this deck, as there is nothing else to do on turn two aside from Impulse. For this reason, they will not clog up the development of your game. With a total of twenty five



Two cards to boost your Mana advantage

mana sources there seems to be a comfortable balance in the deck. The Impulses will also give you a boost if you seem to be stuck on two mana.

Three: Be able to kill creatures

A look at the deck shows that there is no sure way to handle a creature besides Quicksand. This is our first potential problem, and as we look over the list of possible creature elimination cards in blue, only Legacy's Allure stands out. The deck might be an exception to the creature rules, as aside from the multiple counters that could stop creatures, you also have Man-o'-War and Tradewind Rider to halt their progression. One can never have too much creature elimination though, so you set aside four Legacy's Allure to at least have in the sideboard. **Addition — Four Legacy's Allure to the Sideboard.**



Four: Do not be vulnerable to one counter-spell

Hoping that your opponents are not taking this principle to heart, you look at your deck and see that the

eight standard counterspells give you plenty of protection. You set aside three Ertai's Meddling for the sideboard, as additional protection if you were to face a similar deck. Ertai's Meddling gives you a huge advantage when it comes to Counterspell wars, as it makes the counter-spell fizzle once the counters come off of it. **Addition** — Three Ertai's Meddling for the sideboard.



Cope with the early pressure with the Gnomes

Five: Apply early pressure — or be able to cope with it

You are obviously not going to be the one applying the pressure, so the deck has to be able to handle your opponent's pressure. This has always been difficult for Mono-blue decks to achieve, but there are four Bottle Gnomes in the deck, standard. The four Quicksands should also help out, but you pore over the list to see if there is anything else. You even contemplate adding a second color at this point for Earthquakes or some other quick spell. There appear to be no quick solutions, and the Legacy's Allures appear to be even more valuable in the standard deck. Dropping one Dismiss from the deck and one Capsize would make room for two Legacies, and you make that preliminary change. **Addition** — Two Legacy's Allure to the Main Deck and move the Capsize and Dismiss to the sideboard.

Six: Do not be vulnerable to artifacts and enchantments

This deck does not want to be in the position where it has to counter an annoying enchantment in order to get rid of it. The best way to

evaluate the situation is to look at your list of playable cards, and see what enchantments and artifacts might give you problems. Necropotence and Winter Orb are the two that stand out the most, and all you would have to handle them is one capsizes in the main deck, and one in the sideboard. You could adjust your mana base at this time to minor white for Disenchant. I am going to choose not to do this, as I do not expect Winter Orb decks to be prevalent in the immediate future.



A little too specialized perhaps?

Seven: Do not suffer mid-game crisis

This deck has no problem with mid-game advantage, as it packs four Whispers of the Muse. This is a very versatile card as it can be fired off early if the need for cards arises, or it can be saved for a time when it can be used effectively. Remember that the Sapphires affect buyback, so your Whispers of the Muse can end up costing very little. It is very hard for you to lose a game in which you draw four-plus cards more than an opponent. This often happens with this deck.



Perfect for the mid-game

Eight: Be prepared for whatever gives your deck problems

We have already started to assemble a sideboard for the deck:



- 1 Capsize
- 1 Dismiss
- 3 Ertai's Meddling
- 2 Legacy's Allure



The Dismiss is probably not necessary in the sideboard, as the three Ertai's Meddling will be sufficient against another Counterspell deck, but the Capsize will be important against many decks. The deck is still a little susceptible to the array of fast decks that are in the environment, so adding a few Chills to the deck will be of added benefit. As the amount of small creature decks is still unknown, we will add two Suq'ata Firewalkers to deal with this potential problem. Knowing the environment might lean us towards adding three Hydroblasts in addition to the Chills. Having this many cards against one style of deck is unorthodox, but sixty percent of the decks in my area right now are Mono-red so it is an environmental choice. Adding a second Capsize will round out our preliminary sideboard to fifteen and give us a basis to work with during our playtesting. **Addition — three Hydroblast, two Suq'ata Firewalkers and three Chill to the sideboard; drop the Dismiss to make room.**

Nine: Practice, Practice, Practice

As stated before, this is one of the most important principles. It will show us what the deck might have weaknesses against, and allow us to alter the deck to the point where it is tournament worthy. Finding a solid playtest group is very important at this point. For the early tournaments of **Magic**, I simply playtested against myself and relied on a few other people to try to get the best deck possible. This is simply not possible anymore, as others communicate with people all over the country in trying to improve their base of knowledge. An organized team or a group of local players that are willing to work together are the best ways to test your ideas.



The first thing I do with any deck is try to test it against the worst possible matchups. Testing it against cards that will give it a hard time is one way of strengthening the deck but you shouldn't take it too far. Examples of this are Boil and Choke. Testing against Boil, you will find that this deck is very vulnerable to the



Two very difficult cards for this deck

card. This doesn't mean that you should make the deck contain seventeen different land cards that produce blue however. Changing the mana base to include four Svyelunite Temples and four Reflecting Pools will give the deck a more varied base while not affecting the general effectiveness of the Island base.

One thing about playtesting is that it will produce varied results for different people. Two people playing the same deck against five other similar decks might produce different results. No matter what your results are, however, you should feel comfortable with what you are playing. **Addition** — four Reflecting Pool and four Sylvelunite Temple in place of eight of the Islands.

Rule Ten — Know your environment

This rule does not usually come into play until shortly before you start playing. It is only completed after number nine is extensively reviewed. Can this deck beat the most popular decks around? I feel that after playtesting this deck in the Type II environment of early 1998, it will beat any marginal deck in the field. Against the top tier of decks, it will have as good a chance of winning as any deck in the environment. It still has some problems with the early attack, so more play testing is needed.



Last-minute replacements for some land



Finished Control Deck

- 4 Tradewind Rider
- 4 Ophidian
- 4 Man-o'-War
- 4 Counterspell
- 3 Dismiss
- 2 Legacy's Allure
- 4 Whispers of the Muse
- 4 Sapphire Medallion
- 2 Capsize
- 4 Impulse
- 4 Bottle Gnomes
- 4 Quicksand
- 4 Reflecting Pool
- 4 Sylvelunite Temples
- 9 Islands

Sideboard

- 3 Chill
- 2 Capsize
- 3 Ertai's Meddling
- 2 Legacy's Allure
- 3 Hydroblast
- 2 Suq'ata Firewalker

The rules described in the ten principles of deck construction help guide me through each and every deck I create. By following them, I have felt more confident than ever with the decks I choose to play.

The only feeling better than going into a tournament completely prepared is walking up to accept a trophy.

Evaluating Cards

The most anticipation I ever experienced waiting for a set to come out was waiting for *Fourth Edition*. I had been active in the tournament scene for almost three months, and was doing very well in my area with my Balance deck. There had been rumors floating around that Balance would be pulled from the upcoming *Fourth Edition* set. What would I do if that happened? This was the best deck I had ever come up with, and I thought the elimination of Balance would destroy my tournament record. This was before the days of spoiler lists being put on the Internet a few hours after the release of the set, so I had to open four boxes of *Fourth Edition* until I finally found what I was searching for: my Balance.



A few restricted cards

A few weeks later, Balance was restricted in tournament play, and that sent me down a path where I was forced to explore new ideas and deck types. Kicking the Balance crutch from under me helped me progress as a player, and made me look at new concepts that I had previously discarded. At the time, however, I was not as happy about the personal growth opportunity. I had only played Permission until this point, and was very worried that I would not perform as well within the new

environment. My inexperience with other deck types forced me to create a process of evaluating new cards that I still use today. There are times that I forget to brush my teeth. There are times that I forget to change the oil in my car, but there are never times that I forget to use this process once an environment changes.

STEP ONE: EVALUATE WHAT IS AVAILABLE

In the Type II environment as of March 1998, there were five sets you could build decks from: *Fifth Edition*, *Tempest*, *Mirage*, *Visions* and *Weatherlight*. From these five sets of cards, I have created a list of the cards that should be tested for Type II decks. The most important thing about this list is the time it saves when trying to put together decks to test for tournament play. Once you have made a list of the very best cards, you can concentrate on trying to make good decks from them. Here is my personal list of the top cards for Type II before *Stronghold* came out.

Visions

Black — Coercion, Fallen Askari, Funeral Charm, Kaervek's Spite, Nekrataal, Vampiric Tutor

Blue — Chronatog, Impulse, Knight of the Mist, Man-o'-War, Prosperity, Rainbow Efreet, Waterspout Djinn

Green — City of Solitude, Creeping Mold, Elven Cache, Emerald Charm, Quirion Ranger, River Boa, Uktabi Orangutan

Red — Fireblast, Suq'ata Lancer, Viashino Sandstalker

White — Freewind Falcon, Honorable Passage, Longbow Archer, Tithe

Artifact — Anvil of Bogardan, Snake Basket

Land — Quicksand, Undiscovered Paradise

Multi Colored — Scalebane's Elite, Simoon, Squandered Resources

Mirage

Black — Cadaverous Knight, Choking Sands, Dark Banishing, Dark Ritual, Drain Life, Ebony Charm, Forsaken Wastes, Infernal Contract, Shadow Guildmage, Stupor, Tombstone Stairwell

Blue — Dissipate, Memory Lapse, Mystical Tutor, Political Trickery, Power Sink, Suq'ata Firewalker

Green — Armor of Thorns, Granger Guildmage, Hall of Gemstone, Jolrael's Centaur, Maro, Natural Balance, Tranquil Domain, Wall of Roots

Red — Dwarven Miner, Final Fortune, Hammer of Bogardan, Incinerate, Kaervek's Torch, Sirocco, Stone Rain, Talruum Minotaur, Wildfire Emissary

White — Disenchant, Divine Offering, Enlightened Tutor, Null Chamber, Pacifism, Sacred Mesa

Artifact — Cursed Totem, Charcoal Diamond, Fire Diamond, Moss Diamond, Lion's Eye Diamond, Marble Diamond, Sky Diamond, Misers' Cage, Sand Golem

Multi Colored — Cadaverous Bloom, Frenetic Efreem

Land — All sacrifice lands: Bad River, Crystal Vein, Flood Plain, Grasslands, Mountain Valley, Rocky Tar Pit

Weatherlight

Black — Barrow Ghoul, Buried Alive, Infernal Tribute, Morinfen, Necratog, Spinning Darkness, Urborg Stalker

Blue — Disrupt, Merfolk Traders, Ophidian, Pendrell Mists

Green — Fallow Wurm, Gaea's Blessing, Liege of the Hollows, Nature's Resurgence, Rogue Elephant, Tranquil Grove

Red — Aether Flash, Firestorm, Goblin Vandal, Lava Hounds, Orcish Settlers, Thunderbolt

White — Abeyance, Aura of Silence, Gerrard's Wisdom, Tariff

Artifact — Mind Stone, Null Rod, Phyrexian Furnace, Steel Golem

Land — Gemstone Mine

Fifth Edition

Black — Abyssal Specter, Animate Dead, Bad Moon, Black Knight, Derelor, Erg Raider, Gloom, Knight of Stromgald, Necropotence, Pox, Terror

Blue — Air Elemental, Azure Drake, Binding Grasp, Brainstorm, Counterspell, Energy Flux, Hydroblast, Lord of Atlantis, Power Sink, Prodigal Sorcerer, Recall, Spell Blast, Stasis, Steal Artifact, Time Elemental, Wall of Air, Zur's Weirding

Green — Bird of Paradise, Crumble, Elvish Archer, Ghazban Ogre, Giant Growth, Hurricane, Llanowar Elf, Lhurgoyf, Primal Order, Sylvan Library, Titania's Song, Tranquility, Tsunami, Whirling Dervish

Red — Ball Lightning, Disintegrate, Earthquake, Flashfires, Fireball, Ironclaw Orcs, Jokulhaups, Orchish artillery, Orgg, Pyroblast, Shatter, Shatterstorm, Shivan Dragon, Winds of Change

White — Armageddon, CoPs, Crusade, Dust to Dust, Island Sanctuary, Karma, Kismet, Order of the White Shield, Repentant Blacksmith, Reverse Damage, Spirit Link, White Knight, Wrath of God

Artifact — Ankh of Mishra, Ashnod's Altar, Disrupting Scepter, Elkin Bottle, Feldon's Cane, Fellwar Stone, Howling Mine, Jayemdae Tome, Jester's Cap, Mana Vault, Meekstone, Millstone, Nevinyralls Disk, Urza's Bauble, Winter Orb

Land — Adakar Wastes, Brushland, City of Brass, Karpulsian Forest, Sulfurous Springs, Underground River

Tempest

Black — Abandon Hope, Corpse Dance, Diabolic Edict, Dread of Night, Living Death, Perish, Rain of Tears, Sarcomancy

Blue — Capsize, Chill, Dismiss, Intuition, Legacy's Allure, Mana Severance, Meditate, Propaganda, Steal Enchantment, Time Warp, Tradewind Rider, Whim of Volrath, Whispers of the Muse

Green — Choke, Earthcraft, Evish Fury, Harrow, Mirri's Guile, Muscle Sliver, Nature's Revolt, Scragnoth, Trained Armodon, Verdant Force, Verdigris, Winter's Grasp

Red — Boil, Fireslinger, Goblin Bombardment, Hand to Hand, Jackal Pup, Kindle, Lightning Blast, Lightning Elemental, Mogg Conscript, Mogg Fanatic

White — Cloudchaser Eagle, Field of Souls, Humility, Knight of Dawn, Light of Day, Repentance, Soltari Monk, Soltari Priest, Staunch Defender, Winds of Rath

Artifact — Alter of Dimensia, Bottle Gnomes, Cursed Scroll, Jinxed Idol, Puppet Strings, Sapphire Medallion, Scroll Rack, Static Orb, Torture Chamber

Land — Reflecting Pool, Wasteland, All dual-mana lands: Caldera Lake, Cinder Marsh, Mogg Hollows, Pine Barrens, Rootwater Depths, Salt Flats, Scabland, Skyshroud Forest, Thalakos Lowlands, Vec Townships

These are the cards that I use for all of the decks that I build. I always keep my eye out for new cards that I might at some point have overlooked. Some cards also fall off of the list because they prove to be ineffective over the course of time. This ever-changing list is the first thing to create when starting the process of evaluating a new set. It will give you a basis to judge the true power of the new cards.

STEP II — CONSIDER THE DECKS IN AN ENVIRONMENT

The second thing to do when evaluating the cards in a new set is to create a list of decks that are currently being played and you can expect to come up against. Let's use an example of how this process can work.



Considering the environment:
the cards

Youthful Knight in *Stronghold* appears to be a solid creature. It is a 2/1 first strike creature that only costs two mana to cast. As we look at the decks that are in existence, there are two things that stand out. First, the current White Horde deck is full of creatures that either match or exceed the Youthful Knight in power and/or ability. This is probably going to mean that it will have a hard time finding a home in a deck. Second, and most importantly, many decks in the environment seem to be able to handle Youthful Knight very easily. Mono-red decks have Fireslinger and Mogg Fanatic. Five Color Green decks have Granger Guildmage. This, coupled with its greater toughness, leads one to conclude that Longbow Archer would probably be more effective in current white decks if one was looking to add an additional creature.

STEP III — EVALUATE THE CARDS FROM THE NEW SET

If you can learn to evaluate a set once it comes out, you will have an incredible edge on the competition. During the first few months of tournaments, you will be playing with technology far ahead of other competitors. Once they catch up, you will have had that time period to take decks to the next level, and you will be the individual dictating the environment.

The trick is to learn how to properly evaluate the cards in each new set. As I write this, *Stronghold* has just come out, and I want to take you through the step by step process of evaluating a new set for tournament play. By learning the principles of why certain cards work you will



dramatically increase your potency as a Magic player.

The first thing you need to do is realize what environment you are evaluating the new set for. I have chosen to evaluate this set for the Type II environment. If I were evaluating the set for Type I, Extended or *Tempest* block I might get different results, and so an independent review should be done for each. The next step is to have a complete list of the new cards and what they do. I was able to obtain such a list just hours after the pre-release tournaments started by hitting one of the many web-sites that specialize on **Magic: the Gathering**. Learning to use the internet as a tool for **Magic** is essential.

Next, I take the list and a notebook, and I start to take notes. I go down the list one card at a time and evaluate the card for effectiveness. I write down ideas when a card hits me, and try to make a general overview of the set. This process usually takes a few days' worth of free time. After this, I have a working list of cards that should be tested in new decks for tournament play. Below is each card in *Stronghold*, and my initial notes and thoughts on it.

Stronghold Black

Bottomless Pit – I refer to cards that affect both sides of the board as “global effects,” and these cards are normally not that playable. Often, they are intended to create combo oriented situations, i.e. Blanket of Night Warthog. The inherent problem with these types of global effect cards is that they are powerless once the counterpart to the card is broken. There are global effect cards that can be put to good use



however, and Bottomless Pit might fit into this category. It has the continuous depletion effect which makes it worth testing. Black has some problems at times with control decks, and this card would give an advantage in such a situation.

Brush with Death — Buyback was introduced in *Tempest*, and with it a new way of looking at the game was formed. There are some game-altering buyback cards like Whispers of the Muse in *Tempest*, and some, like Worthy Cause, that will line the 10 cent box. One definite way to determine whether a card is going to be good is look at the past. What cards are close to it in nature and how did they perform? Siphon Soul never rocked the game, because it was too limiting in its nature. A direct damage spell has to have the side ability of eliminating creatures to be effective. The potential buyback does not outweigh this liability.



Cannibalize — Creature elimination is always at a premium, but in constructed deck it needs to actually kill creatures. On top of this, it needs to be consistent. If we look at our list of cards, we see that Diabolic Edict is superior to Cannibalize. Can you use this on your own creatures? If you do it is a two-card Giant Strength.



Corrupting Licid — Big Licids are here with *Stronghold*. I love playing the Licids in limited environments because they are very flexible. They serve as Gossamer Chains in many situations, and always have an interesting ability that gives you an edge. In constructed decks, Corrupting Licid simply loses a touch of its effectiveness. There are creatures that are simply faster and more effective. The *Stronghold* Licids suffer from the Gray Ogre syndrome, 2/2 for three. Frankly, this is not fast enough to keep up in today's environment.



Crovax the Cursed — Creatures are the easiest things to evaluate in a new set. The mana curve allows you to easily compare new creatures with other similar creatures. If a card breaks the mana curve, as Crovax does, then what are the handicaps to the card? Here is a simple rule to follow: If a card has to eat your creatures during upkeep to be effective, it better be incredibly powerful and fast to cast. A 5/5 (effectively) on turn five attacking is nice, but at what price? Ravenous Vampire did not make the tournament scene, and Crovax might have the same fate.



Dauthi Trapper — We look at our creature chart, and a 1/1 for three mana is a little low on the desirability list. Many cards are designed for Sealed Deck, and this appears to be one of them.

If you want shadow in Black, there are numerous other good shadow creatures in the environment already.



Death Stroke — On the surface Death Stroke appears to be decent. Creature Elimination for two mana. If we look at what is available in the current environment, we see that Diabolic Edict, Terror, and Dark Banishing are all more flexible. Besides being a situation based card, Death Stroke is a Sorcery, and instant creature kill is more flexible. On the up side, it gives Black a way to deal with other Black creatures. In the end, unless Black makes a resurgence, Death Stroke will not make it into many decks.

Dungeon Shade — The Darkling Stalker is reborn. This card is going to be extremely popular in Sealed Deck, but creatures that require mana to make them efficient have problems in constructed environments. Tying up your mana to attack with this creature is only going to delay the development of the rest of your game. Without



regeneration, like the Darkling Stalker has, it is going to be extremely easy for any deck with red to kill. A good Sealed Deck card, but not up to par in the constructed environment.

Foul Imp — The imps get stronger. Pit Imp's bigger brother is a little more difficult to judge. When *Visions* first came out, I tried Fledgling Djinn. Speed kills in constructed decks, but the one life a turn was simply too much to take, and the creature was discarded after testing. Is the two life going to be too much?

Probably. If you are looking for evasive ability, the shadow creatures in black offer the same as Foul Imp, without the damaging side effects.



Grave Pact — Every time I cast a Black Knight, it is going to be fairly effective. Every time I have an Incinerate, it will deal three damage to something. Every time I cast Grave Pact, any number of things might happen. If my opponent is not playing creatures, nothing will happen, except me looking at the card in my hand. If my opponent is playing creatures, then I am wasting one of my valuable creature elimination slots for Grave Pact. The card is simply too situation-based to be effective.



Lab Rats — Rats, Rats, Rats. Getting over the initial desire of wanting to immediately kill every opponent in site with my Goblin Bombardment/Rats deck brings us to the question of creature makers. Breeding Pit was ineffective and Kjeldoran Outpost was incredibly powerful. Where will Lab Rats fall? Most likely somewhere towards Breeding Pit. I wish this card was an Instant so I could cast Rats into play on my opponents turn. Its being a sorcery might prove to be a huge disadvantage. In any case, any card that can be reused without requiring certain situations (i.e. Worthy Cause) definitely deserves to be tested. Just don't make a Crovax the Cursed/Lab Rat deck, please!



Megrim — The problem with cards like Megrim is that they do not help you control the game in any way. One advantage of them, though, is that they add power to many of the other cards in your deck. Stupor becomes a Fireblast, etc. There has never been a card like Megrim before, and thus it is hard to judge. It might resurrect an old deck archetype, true discard, and because of this, will make the potential list.



Mind Peel — This card falls into the same category as Lab Rats, due to its reusability. Corpse Dance, Capsize, Whispers of the Muse and other

great buyback cards, make cards like Mind Peel definitely worth testing. I can't see it replacing Coercion or Stupor in decks, but it might make the sideboard of some decks after testing. It might never be played in any tournament ever as well.



Mindwarper — A 3/3 creature for four mana is very average. Once again, the reusability of the counters make this worth watching. In the end, I think that because of the mana attached for activation, it is not going to make the cut in any decks.

Morgue Thrull — Just think, if I get my Thrull Champion out... I will end that fantasy there. Gray Ogre strong and Alter of Dementia capable do not make a good combination. A look at the Living Death decks shows us that this card does not add anything to them.



Mortuary — Gravebane Zombie is an extremely good Sealed Deck card, but never made it in the constructed environment. The reason was, aside from the average casting cost, there were times when you simply didn't want to put it back on top of your library. The problem was that it required you to recast it every time and at times it put you into a lock when you absolutely needed to draw something else. This is an inherent problem with this card. It is still a very powerful ability, and whenever a global ability that is new to the environment comes in, you must at least put it on your watch list.



Rabid Rats — Without a doubt, this card was made for the sealed environment. It doesn't come close on the mana curve to other creatures for two mana. Remember this rule in constructed deck environments: Creatures who give other creatures abilities do not join creatures in the decks you play. As a side note, I want to know when the Rat Lord is going to be made. WE want a leader!



Revenant — This creature card is a little hard for me to gauge. It is obviously situation based, but it might be a very effective closer for a fast Black or Red/Black deck. Rathi Dragon works very well in

the same capacity in the Mono-red deck, but the difference is that you know what you are getting every time with the Rathi. Closers can be very important in fast decks, as they provide an immediate killing threat. Nightmare is probably better if you want a closer in your black creature decks.



Serpent Warrior — Serpent Warrior might appear to have the same reasons as Foul Imp for testing. The three life is too much to pay, as it will be completely ineffective against Mono-red. Being a ground creature also denies it the evasive ability needed. In any color besides green, there is going to be a major drawback to a 3/3 creature for three mana. Sometimes these creatures are going to be worth testing, and sometimes they are going to be like Serpent Warrior.



Skeleton Scavengers — Paying life for abilities has proven to be effective in tournament play. Juzam Djinn showed us this, especially when you do not have to be dependent on your mana to do so. I must look to past cards when deciding about this



card. Mischievous Poltergeist was a 1/1 flyer with relatively the same ability, and it failed to make any decks. The reason was that it was simply too slow. Skeleton Scavengers can get bigger, but there reaches a point where you simply can't pay any more. In the end, the creature will prove to simply be too slow.

Stronghold Assassin — This falls under the general rule of requiring the sacrifice of creatures to be effective being a bad thing. If used to sacrifice itself, then Dark Banishing would be much more effective. It has a little flexibility. I am going to stick to the general rule, and we'll see if anyone can prove me wrong.



Stronghold Taskmaster — Stone Giant does not have the drawback, is not susceptible to Incinerate, and is still not played. Over half of the playable black creatures do not have a toughness greater than 1. If I am not playing other Black creatures, then being the only target will make it not last long in game play. Being double black limits playing it in multi color decks. There are ample reasons that it will not make decks.



Torment — When I play with creature destruction in constructed decks, I like to make sure they actually eliminate the creature. This is a bad Pacifism, as it allows the creature to stay around

and at least chump block for a turn. There are those extremely bad situations where I may need to get rid of a Tradewind Rider, Fireslinger or other non-attacking creature, and this simply will not do the job. It will still make a good Sealed Deck card, however.



Tortured Existence — This is a perfect card to compare to an existing card in the environment. Disturbed Burial takes up the same slot Tortured Existence does, but it does not require you to lose a creature from your hand. They both have the ability of recycling as well.



Wall of Souls — Almost every player immediately discards walls when it comes to constructed deck. They sit around being defensive and never kill an opponent. Here comes a wall that will bite back and be relatively hard to kill. The problem with Wall of Souls will be that it will be useless against Control decks, but it is fast and will hold off many quick decks. Yes, I am actually recommending a wall to test for constructed decks.



Whenever you finish evaluating a color make a list of the questions that stand out in your mind. Here is my list for black:

Will Wall of Souls be effective in creature-based decks?

How effective will Mind Peel and Lab Rats actually be?

Can either Revenant or Crovax be used as an effective closer?

Is there a new deck archetype in Megrim?

How good is Bottomless Pit against counterspell decks?

By making this list of questions you give yourself a working checklist when testing the cards.

Stronghold Blue

Next we move to blue, which is the base color of many of the top decks in the environment. With Tradewinds, Man-o'-Wars, Ophidians and multiple Counterspells, blue based decks have been winning many tournaments.

Cloud Spirit — Cloud Elementals are used in many Type II decks but often do not seem to provide the needed punch. Cloud Spirit has that extra punch that makes it worth festing. Whenever you break down a set be sure to recognize the cards that can come



out quickly and be elusive. Many shadow decks are built on this concept.

Contempt — Once again I like my creature control to be efficient, and this is not. After I get whacked, my opponent gets to recast his creature. He ties up his mana again but so do I. The creature is always available to block for my opponent.



Dream Halls — Blue seems to be the master of five casting cost enchantments that get you excited. In *Mirage*, there was Bazaar of Baghdad. In *Tempest*, there was Duplicity. Both had solid abilities, but were simply too expensive to be consistently effective. This will be the case with Dream Halls as well. How many of you were able to read this card and understand what it did without reading it a few more times?



Dream Prowler — One point of unblockable damage will not put much pressure on an opponent. Phantom Warrior was 2/2 for one less to cast and was never used. This



card seems like an aggressive wall, and will be categorized as such. I would rather have a Tradewind Rider, Fighting Drake or Azure Drake over this card. I cannot see the time where I will ever play 13 creatures that cost four or more mana to cast.

Evacuation — Often times you need to use your experience in making a decision to test or not test a card. A good player will never overextend themselves against you. At most they will have three creatures in play, but rarely even that. This puts a card like Evacuation in an interesting category, because it will only delay and not punish an over-extended deck like Wrath of God does.



Gliding Lizard — All Lizards have the same evaluation. Cute, but not going to see much first string action in constructed decks.



Hammerhead Shark — The DanDan is back. I imagine that over the years there will be several blue creatures for two mana that can't attack unless the opponent controls islands. They will all have two things in common.

First, they will have a combined power and toughness of five. Second, I will not be playing with any of them. I require my creatures to be somewhat effective against all decks. I don't need another small wall.

Hesitation — One of the things that often separates tournament players in degree of skill is knowing when to counter items. Put a Counterspell deck in the hands of an amateur and they will often lose because of inexperience. Put the same deck in the hands of a professional and they can master an opponent. This card gives your opponent that choice and so I cannot recommend it. It might slow down an opponent, but I would rather have a Counterspell, Dismiss or even a Powersink over this card, as I like to be the one who dictates when I say no.



Intruder Alarm — Propaganda is very good because it forces an opponent to tie up their mana, and disallows multiple attacking creatures. Having two Propagandas on the board does not hurt you, because their effects are cumulative. Two Intruder Alarms on the board gives you no such tactical advantage. The card allows an opponent to attack and then cast a creature, nullifying the cards usefulness.



With that said there might be strong possibilities with this card. Whenever you have a card nullify any part of the untap phase then it has to be considered. An Intruder Alarm on the board backed up by multiple Counterspells might be a very good concept. It also forces an opponent to overextend, making them more vulnerable to Earthquake and Wrath of God. This might be a sleeper that emerges as more people test the card.

Leap — Cantrips are always fun and even effective once in a while. Normally they bog down your deck and can throw your mana curve off if you have too many of them. With four Whispers of the Muse available, I don't think you will see many decks take up spaces with cantrips such as Leap. On the positive side, Jump sure has come a long way.



Mana Leak — On surface level, Mana Leak appears to be much better than Power Sink which is played in many decks. You get away with the low casting cost of the spell by realizing that every once in a while it is not going to work. There will be far more cases that it does work, however, and it is nice that there is an effective counter spell for one blue mana again. The main thing that Mana Leak will provide is the resurgence of multi color decks. These four and five color decks have



always needed a counterspell available to them to stop key cards that hurt their deck. Mana Leak provides this countering ability.

Mask of the Mimic — If your opponent tries to Dark Banish a creature, you could use this to effectively save it. There are a few more situation based circumstances I can think of, but a lot more where it simply would be a dead card in your hand. Wouldn't a Counterspell be more versatile and do the same thing? I try to use cards that are effective every time I draw them and this isn't close.



Mind Games — Mind Games is worth testing because of its buyback ability only. I can see it used in Static and Winter Orb decks because of the lack of any Icy Manipulator in play. Remembering old decks is very important when going over new cards.



Ransack — Anytime you have a card that can manipulate an opponent's draw you have to test it. On turn four, denying a mana starved opponent lands or on turn ten giving them lands can effectively clog them up. In the



end, it provides no true card advantage, which will prove to be the reason it is not played.

Rebound — A mini-Deflection. You can picture the times where an opponent Fireballs you for ten and you cast Rebound to send it back to them. The problem is that for every time that happens, they kill one of your creatures or destroy one of your permanents twenty times. Counterspells are much more versatile and provide the same defense.



Reins of Power — Sometimes you see new cards that just scream out to be tested. They break the old rules and create new possibilities. Let us assume that your opponent has a lot of creatures out and you have none. Then you are going to hit your opponent, but still are not in a good position because you will probably be hit for the same amount next turn, and they still have creatures around. However, if we throw a Goblin Bombardment on the table, we just have created an instant Wrath of God for their side that does damage. That possibility makes this card worth testing.



Sift – Card advantage is always nice. This is what many might call a fixed Ancestral Recall. The card is expensive for what it does, but because it provides a nice card advantage it is worth testing. Always test new cards that provide card advantage. Although I am going to test it on principle,

the fact that it is a Sorcery is probably going to make it counter-productive in blue decks.

Silver Wyvern — Blue has an abundance of quality flyers already, so it is going to be very hard to break into the big blue dining club. Five mana and situation-based use are not enough for me. An Incinerate would not kill an Air Elemental, and Dark Banishing means they are probably playing with black creatures, so you can't use the ability. Wrath of God is white's main clean up spell, and if they are playing green they don't have any targeting spells anyway. One of the main reasons that Rainbow Effreet did not become popular in tournament play is because it effectively took six mana to cast it.



Spindrift Drake — Fast creatures should always be tested in any environment. You don't get much faster than this. Whenever a creature comes out this quick, you have to test it. Flying Savanna Lions are pretty good.





Thalagos Deceiver — Whether a creature is good or bad almost always come down to the casting cost of the creature. Four mana is just simply too much for this 1/1. Legacy's Allure is a better card, as there usually are less things to deal with enchantments than with creatures.



Tidal Warrior — 1/1 creatures are usually bad. They always suffer matchup problems in creature battles and never do enough damage against control-type decks. The ability to tie up a land for a turn is a nuisance at best, no matter how many Hammerhead Sharks you have on the table.



Tidal Surge — Tidal Surge is a card that was designed for Sealed Deck. There are not too many constructed circumstances where I need to tap three creatures on my turn.



Volrath's Shapeshifter — There have been many attempts to make another Clone, and unlike the sheep in Britain, they have all failed. It is almost impossible to maintain the top card of your graveyard to be what you want it to be. I know that many are going to try to have the biggest

creature in the world and discard it. Will this work? If you are so inclined, test it, as I am interested myself. I am always interested to see if old themes that have never worked before can be revived. They usually can't.



Walking Dream — Far too situation-based to be considered a viable card. True top-rank cards are good almost every time you draw them. Since this does not break the mana curve, the special ability does not make the creature worth it.

Wall of Tears — I will have to admit, the walls are getting better. This wall does not have the same offensive threat as Wall of Souls. I would rather pay one more mana for a Wall of Air, as the bounce-back effect is marginal in any conventional deck.



These questions stand out after finishing an evaluation of blue:

Will the addition of quick flyers create a new aggressive blue-based deck?

How many new multi-colored decks are possible with the addition of Mana Leak?

Is the Winter Orb deck going to be enhanced by Mind Games?

Is Reigns of Power powerful or misleadingly good?

Stronghold Green

There are many that say there are four colors in **Magic**, and then there is green. This is not meant as a compliment. There have always been problems with green when it comes to advanced play, and the main one has been lack of creature control. Some of the best creatures in the game are green, but without the ability to control your opponent's board, you will end up on the short end of many games. I am always interested to see what attempts have been made to improve green's standing.

Awakening — Cards like this always make you think. This card has a very powerful ability which makes mana-intensive cards more viable. It is matter of time before a deck evolves around this card. The strength of the deck remains to be seen, but never underestimate the ability to control mana.



Burgeoning — Land development is as essential as anything else in the game of **Magic**. Whenever



cards like this one come along, it is essential to test them. It will almost always mean three mana by turn two.

Carnassid — Six mana is simply too much for a creature in today's environment. The casting cost dictates a creature's worth in today's environment. If it is going to cost six, it needs to do a little more than regenerate.



Constant Mists — It was only a matter of time before the buyback Fog arrived. Cards like Fog never make the cut in constructed deck, as they do not affect the board control. It does not kill the creature causing you to Fog, it only delays the problem. In Sealed Deck, however, this card is incredible.



Crossbow Ambush — This will be a very good surprise card in Sealed Deck, but it is not versatile enough for tournament play. Cards like this need to be effective every time that you play.



Elven Rite — Giant Growth became a viable tournament card because of its surprise factor. A player would block with a creature, and you could effectively kill that creature with Giant Growth. Elven rite offers no such surprise factor. It is more like Giant Strength than Giant Growth. Since constructed decks are designed to be able to kill creatures, you have an inherent problem with creature enhancement spells.

Endangered Armadon — A 4/5 reminds everyone of the days of Ernham. This card might not be as good as Ernham, but it obviously has potential. It destroys the mana curve for creatures, and the drawback can be totally controlled by you in designing your deck. Endangered Armadon is worth testing in almost all green decks.



Hermit Druid — Besides being able to get around mana problems, this little creature will feed Living Death decks. It might provide good card advantage in the right deck, as it is consistently getting cards. Being a creature of limited power might be a drawback if you are counting on this card to feed cards into the graveyard.



Lowland Basilisk — When evaluating the tournaments you have played in during the past year, how many times did a 1/3 creature win a game against you (Besides Bottle Gnomes being sacrificed!). 1/3 is not an effective power/toughness ratio, as it deals little damage and can be killed quite easily. The side ability of Lowland Basilisk adds little to the value of the creature.

Mulch — Green always has plenty of ways to produce extra mana. The key is identifying which are more productive. Mulch might give you more than one extra land, but it doesn't speed up your mana base like Rampant Growth or Harrow. If you are trying to get additional creatures into your graveyard, Hermit Druid can be reused more than once.



You have to evaluate the many green land producers that are in the environment and determine which ones are best for your deck.

Overgrowth — Overgrowth is just a pumped up Wild Growth. The best thing about Wild Growth



was that it came out on turn one helping you build a quick mana base. Overgrowth is to Wild Growth what Fyndorn Elf was to Llanowar Elf. Both are too slow compared to their smaller counterpart.

Primal Rage — Cards like Fervor, Dense Foliage, and Primal Rage provide wide range effects for all of your creatures. They all can have situations where they can be effective, but they are not consistent. Blanket effect cards like Primal Rage are cards that I avoid when building decks, mainly because of the consistency problem. Cards need to be useful by themselves to make it into the best decks.



Provoke — One of the tricks in learning how to build good decks is identifying cards that can be useful all of the time. In Sealed Deck, Provoke will be very good as almost always there is a situation where there are multiple creatures on the board. In constructed, it is nearly impossible to tell what the situation will be from round to round. One round you will play against a deck with no creatures and the next maybe you will play against a Shadow creature deck. For every time you untap a creature and are able to kill that creature, there will be two or three where the card is a cantrip at best.

Skyshroud Archer — Might be an effective Sealed Deck card, but it is not effective enough in constructed.



Skyshroud Troopers — The casting cost makes Skyshroud Troopers very commonplace. In green it is actually behind the mana curve. The added ability of adding green mana adds very little by turn five.



Spike Breeder — Another card that will be very good in Sealed Deck. A 3/3 for four mana is commonly referred to as a Hill Giant, no matter what it's actual name is. These are usually solid creatures and do very well in the sealed environment. They are simply a step behind in speed for the constructed environment. The ability of Spike Breeder is cute but not enough to make it playable, as you would need a few creatures on the board to make it useful and, at the same time, you leave yourself open to Perish and Wrath of God.



Spike Colony — Whenever a green card comes out that boosts up power and toughness I try to

compare it to existing cards such as Bounty of the Hunt and Elvish Fury. For five mana I can buyback Elvish Fury and still use it again. The surprise factor exists with Fury and, most importantly, I can always cast it for one. The five mana for Spike Colony is simply too much to be effective in tournament play.

Spike Feeder — As I look at the spikes, I think it would be fun to play a spike deck with all of the counters bouncing back and forth. In tournament play, the creatures are simply not efficient enough to be used.



Spike Soldier — This is the most interesting of the Spikes, because it can survive combat situations by boosting itself up. Again, however, it will end up too slow in tournament play.



Spike Worker — For the same reasons as the rest of the Spikes, I am not going to test this creature, but will play with it in Sealed Deck.



Spined Wurm — If creatures cost five or more mana then they fall into the same category — they'd better be incredible if you are going to use them. This is only a more efficient Craw Wurm, and will do nothing that a half of dozen other Green creatures can't do.

Tempting Licid — I do not know why I love the Licids. I think the idea for them was very good and they are very good in Sealed Deck. As with the other Licids this simply is not efficient enough to be used in constructed.



Verdant Touch — Buyback can be very efficient, and anything that can make those mid-game lands efficient is worthy of testing. I think the card will be more efficient in a slower *Tempest* environment than the faster Type II environment but it might be worth it. As with other buyback cards, the reusability of the card makes it worth testing.

Volrath's Gardens — The problem with cards that gain life is that they are either superb, like *Bottle Gnomes*, or below average, like *Stream of Life*. *Volrath's Gardens* puts you in the position to not go on the offensive in order to gain life. While it doesn't appear like it is going to work, you have to test all potential life gainers, as you



never know when you might find the next Ivory Tower, Bottle Gnomes, or Gerrard's Wisdom.

Wall of Blossoms —

The walls in this set are perhaps the best walls ever. Cantrips that can permanently block could be very good.



The following are questions that arise from looking at green:

What are the possibilities with Awakening?

Can Endangered Armadon make green a force in Type II again?

What will emerge as the best mana producers from the set?

How soon will players start comparing the Spikes to Thallids?

Will Wall of Blossoms become a staple in Type II decks?

Stronghold Red

Whenever a new set comes out, I am afraid of what new red spells come with it. What new fast creatures and spells will be added to the already deadly red environment? Mono-red decks are extremely popular in the Type II environment, and even more so in the *Tempest* only environ-

ment. With Jackal Pup, Mogg Fanatic, Fireslinger, and Canyon Wildcat backed up with Kindle and Incinerate, the red decks can be easily played and are deadly.

Amok — Stormbind has been one of the only cards ever to effectively use your hand as a resource. Most of the time, the price of discarding valuable cards from your hand simply is not effective. With Amok you need three cards, including Amok, to equal one Giant Strength. This simply is not a good use of your resources.



Convulsing Lcid — All previous commentary and criticism on Lcids apply here.



Craven Giant — Craven Giant breaks the Mana curve as a couple of other creatures have in this set, and so it must be tested. The card would obviously be played in an aggressive deck, and is large enough to kill the walls that will be used out of this set.



Duct Crawler — Mogg Fanatic and Jackal Pup set the standard when it comes to first turn red creatures. The Duct



Crawler's ability is weak, and that ability is the sole factor when evaluating a 1/1 creature for one mana.

Fanning the Flames — There is almost always a red X spell in every set. Comparing the new one to existing direct damage spells is the only way to efficiently gauge the card's effectiveness. In the best Mono-red decks there are few if any X spells because of the abundance of quicker direct damage cards (i.e. Incinerate, Kindle and



Fireblast). The best two X spells in their respective environments have been Fireball and Rolling Thunder. Fanning the Flames does not provide

the extra ability that either one of the above do in killing multiple creatures. The buyback is intriguing, but the intensive mana that it requires will limit it in game play.



Flame Wave — Seven mana. That is such a high amount that any card that costs that can not be counted on in game play.



Fling — If no direct damage cards existed, we would have to take a look at Fling. Since there are countless red damage spells, the times that Fling would be effective simply do not warrant the setbacks associated with the card.

Flowstone Blade — These type of cards are very good in Sealed Deck. They serve as creature elimination most of the time, and can always double for that last bit of damage you might need. In constructed, they simply are not effective, as in red you want your creature elimination spells to double up as damage spells that can kill your opponent.



Flowstone Hellion — A 3/3 flyer unaffected by summoning sickness would be a little below average for red at five mana. A 5/1 flyer is very intriguing, as it might help a red deck get over the layers of ground defense that emerge often with the new walls.



Flowstone Mauler — I don't get excited as much over the Mauler, compared to the Hellion, as the one extra mana can mean several turns. The pumping ability requires mana to use, which limits its effectiveness.

Flowstone Shambler — Flowstone Shambler can come over as a 3/1, but it ties up your mana if you do so. That will make it prohibitive in constructed. I would rather play with a Suq'ata Lancer.



Furnace Spirit — If you have five mana on the table, you will be able to attack for three. Each subsequent turn will force you to tie up your mana in order to make it effective. Creatures that require you to use mana in order to be effective are usually too limiting.



Heat of Battle — A global enchantment that you have little control over. It can provide a little extra damage in a quick creature deck, but I would much rather be casting a creature on turn two than this enchantment.



Invasion Plans — This card can only get you in trouble. Besides being useless against a creature-less deck, let us set up the following scenario. You lay a turn two Canyon Wildcat. Your opponent lays a turn two Skyshroud Elf. Perfect, you lay the Invasion Plans and their Elf is history — note that their Elf could have been killed by several other spells at that point. They respond by laying a



turn three Trained Armadon, and all of your plans backfire. Sure you can exchange creatures, but are forced to do so. I would never want to put myself in this situation.

Mob Justice — Although I like the name, my cards need to do more than just damage my opponent. This card requires you to overextend your creature base in order to make it useful.



Mogg Bombers — This is effectively a four casting cost Incinerate. It breaks the mana curve at 3/4 but is so fragile that the combat damage is inconsequential. In Type II and *Tempest* this card is not playable. In Sealed Deck this card is even less playable, due to the high creature count.



Mogg Flunkies — Mogg Flunkies breaks the mana curve, and because of this has to be tested. The penalty of having to have another creature attack is hardly noticed by a Mono-red deck, as they are trying to put the pressure on. I am sure that this card will make its way into almost all aggressive Mono red decks.





Mogg Infestation — An interesting card, and could be very effective in the right deck. What is that deck? That is what testing is for. An absolute bomb in Sealed Deck, as it can effectively win the game. Ten 1/1 creatures are a lot better than five good creatures for your opponent. My gut reaction is that, if we look at the basic principle when evaluating cards, we see that creature elimination that doesn't actually eliminate all of your opponents creatures is normally not good.



Mogg Maniac — The reverse effect of the Jackal Pup. A 1/1 for two mana is not very efficient, and the ability does not make up for it in either the constructed or Sealed Deck environments.



Ruinination — When *Tempest* arrived, a wonderful sideboard card was created — Boil. Because of how effective it is, many blue players diverted their mana base to include Reflecting Pools, Gemstone Mines, and other sources they could use to produce blue mana. By doing this, they effectively lessened Boil's devastation effect. Ruination can serve in the same fashion against four and five color decks, and serve as a one/two punch against the all-blue decks.



Seething Anger — Giant Growth is effective because of its ability to save a creature and kill another. Seething Anger is not as effective, as it provides no surprise factor and doesn't strengthen

the defense on a card. The buyback ability might make it more effective, although the sorcery ability might be too much to overcome.



Shard Phoenix — A Hammer/Earthquake that can hang around to attack is worth exploring. Good reusable cards are always at a premium, and you never know where the next Hammer is going to be found. I am sure that it will be in red. The key to this card is its reusability.



Shock — Instant creature removal that doubles for damage is always nice. There is always an attempt to bring old cards back in a “fixed”

form. A new lightning bolt has to be looked at, even if it is a bit smaller.

Spitting Hydra — The Hydras have never struck fear in the heart of tournament players. They have been slow and ineffective. This Hydra is a small exception, as it is can serve as creature control, but in the end will simply cost too much mana to effectively use.



Wall of Razors — Another good Wall. I do not like this one as much as others, as it is much easier to kill. Because of this, Wall of Razors will not be used as much as the black, green and white walls. In Sealed Deck, however, it will an



incredible asset, as 4/1 first strike creatures stop almost everything.

The following questions came to mind after evaluating red:

Is Ruination going to alter the way players build their mana bases to decks?

Are Mogg Flunkies as good as they appear to be?

Is Flowstone Hellion an effective late game card?

Shard Phoenix, the next Hammer?

Stronghold White

White has always had some of the best cards in the game of **Magic**. Wrath of God, Swords to Plowshares, Armageddon, Disenchant, and the Knights, have given white a base to build countless decks with. It will be interesting to see what *Stronghold* provides.



Bandage — Heal back in a different name. It never made the decks before, because it is a cantrip that can't even be cycled through quickly against certain decks.

Calming Licid — A walking Pacifism. It will just be a little too slow in constructed play, but has the most potential out of any of the Licids. In sealed it should be played if you are playing white.



Change of Heart — This can only tie up your mana and serve as a marginal card. This always needs to be looked at when evaluating new cards. Marginal cards do not win tournaments. I like buyback, but I want more out of any card that I play.

Contemplation — Life gainers can be very important. They usually need to be instantaneous in order to be effective. Gerrard's Wisdom provides this, and usually gains between 8 and 10 life. Contemplation will take several turns in order to come close to accomplishing this same life gain. If you need to gain life, this will simply take too long. Still, one of the golden rules I have when evaluating a new set is take a look at life gainers.



Conviction — Hero's Resolve is being tested by many pro players, as against many decks it gives a tremendous advantage. Because it can be bought back, it might be playable, but Flickering Ward might be a better bounce enchantment.



Hidden Retreat — There seems to be a theme in the *Tempest* environment to use your hand as a resource. The problem is that your hand is inherently the best resource that you have. This is very one dimensional, and as most red and black decks deal the majority of their damage these days through creatures, this will be ineffective against the decks it can defeat the most. The best thing that Hidden Retreat has going for it is that it costs nothing to activate, and this alone can be very important.

Honor Guard — 1/1s for one mana are not effective unless they have an awesome ability. Pumping up toughness does not define awesome.



Lancers en-Kor — This creature is marginally hard to kill in combat, which will make it an excellent card in Sealed Deck. In constructed it will suffer from the fact that most of the really good white creatures have a low toughness. For the same casting cost, I can have a *Staunch Defenders*. To make it really effective, I need multiple creatures on the board, which leaves me vulnerable to spells such as *Wrath of God*.



Nomads en-Kor — Combine the above commentary on Lancer's en-Kor and Honor Guard.



Pursuit of Knowledge — This card has so many ways to abuse it. Draw seven cards, there must be some kind of drawback, right? Just think of Sylvan Library, Mirri's Guile, Brainstorm etc. This card will be extremely popular in many decks. It probably will be one of the first cards I test. The ability to draw cards should always be looked at when first evaluating a set.

Rolling Stones — Walls are not generally offensive in nature — which means that the vast majority of them make very poor attackers. A blinding flash of the obvious, I know, but if you have enough walls in your deck to make this card work, your deck is unlikely to be particularly competitive.



Sacred Ground — The use of this card is obvious — stop land destruction. From singular land destruction to Armageddon, it will shut these cards down. With that said, it is a sidebar card at best, and it comes down to knowing your environment to determine if you should or should not play it.



Samite Blessing — In constructed deck tournaments, I have never seen any of the healers make a difference. This card, aside from being a creature enchantment, also limits the ability of protecting you. Using this card to stop potential damage would mean that Honorable Passage had left the environment. You should never underestimate the power of surprise.



Scapegoat — Scapegoat has card disadvantage written all over it. There might be a circumstance that this could work, but it comes down to a question of consistency again. I like cards to be solid each time that I draw them.

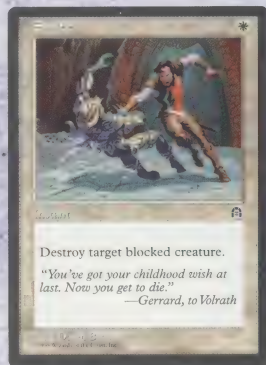


Shamen en-Kor — In constructed, this card would be too ineffective due to casting cost. The lack of surprise factor limits its usefulness.

Skyshroud Falcon — Zephyr Falcon is admitted by all tournament players to be below average in constructed deck, but you will encounter varied opinions in Sealed Deck.



Smitē — This appears to be workable when you first look at it, but when you think of the type of decks that you might include it in, you begin to rethink that conclusion. Most white decks are generally offensive in nature, and this card is totally defensive. Sure, you could build a deck around it, but what kind of a deck would it be? Sit back and wait with walls? That would appear to be the one deck that it could be used in.



Soltari Champion — It is interesting how good a card can be in one environment, and so completely average in another. It is one of the great things about the game of Magic. Soltari Champion is a little slow in constructed, and you seldom have enough creatures on the board to make up for the difference. There are so many good white cards that have protection



from a certain color, that any creature that doesn't need to have a very special ability. However, this is an incredible Sealed Deck card.



Spirit en-Kor — As stated before, the effectiveness of a creature comes down to its casting cost. The 2/2 for four mana is well behind the curve and the en-Kor's abilities seem to require multiple creatures on the board to be made useful. This is counterproductive in constructed deck.

Temper — Temper boils down to being a very expensive prevention spell that has the added ability of putting counters on. I will hold to the belief that in constructed I will never play a spell that doesn't protect both myself and my creatures. I like versatility in the cards I play.



Venerable Monk — Playing Portal with new players taught me that this card is very average. Magic is too fine tuned a game to play an average card. The extra life can be nice at times, but not to put a Gray Ogre on the Board.



Wall of Essence — The category of cards I am most impressed with in this set are the walls. Unless killed, this wall can hold off two creatures effectively. That is not bad at all and could provide the several turns needed to set up a solid defense: If I block a Ball Lightning with this card, I gain a net of four life. That is all I needed to hear to start testing this card.

Warrior Angel — Six mana is far too much for a creature in the Type II environment these days. If you can get it out, it is very good in game play, but often it will simply sit in your hand staring you down.



Warrior en-Kor — This is one of the en-Kors that might be worth playing. It fits the standard for a good creature on the mana curve. The ability might be nice in certain situations, but I don't have to sacrifice to have this extra bonus.

Youthful Knight — Refer to the opening example of card evaluation.

The questions raised with white are:

Is Wall of Essence going to change the dynamics of the Mono red deck?

How good is Pursuit of Knowledge? A game breaker or is it misleading?

Is Smite going to serve as creature control in many white decks?

Stronghold Multi Color

Since all of the Multi colored cards are Slivers, I am going to write some generalizations about what I see. Anyone that has ever heard me lecture

about combination-decks knows that I am not a big fan of them. I feel that they are fragile and easily prepared for. The last year of **Magic** has altered my thinking on the subject somewhat, with the invention of the Cadaverous Bloom deck. With multiple Tutors available to get the cards you need, these decks seem more viable. Never before has a combination deck based on creatures made it to the highest level of tournament play. With Slivers I believe that this is possible. Before *Stronghold* came out you had Slivers, which, when put in the right deck, were downright deadly. Mnemonic and Mindwhip Slivers made you able to get any sliver in the graveyard and get a bonus for them. Muscle slivers pumped up all Slivers, and in combination with certain cards like Living Death you had a potentially great deck.

Stronghold only strengthens that type of deck. Acidic Sliver has to be killed, or your opponent will have problems. Spined Sliver works in conjunction with Muscle Sliver to make some incredibly effective creatures, and Victual Sliver gives you a lot of time against a Mono red deck. The Sliver Queen is simply huge.

The mana for such a deck might be possible with the varied multi lands that exist in the different sets, and with cards like Harrow it might be very easy to get the deck to a point where it is not only tournament viable, but where it becomes a serious tournament deck.

Slivers have taught me a very valuable lesson, in that I will not discard a creature class that works together. This is the reason that I will test Spike decks even though they do not impress me. If nothing else, the games that I test them with will be some of the more enjoyable games that I play in **Magic**.

Stronghold Artifacts

Artifacts are always the area where potential environment-breaking cards exist. Cursed Scroll from *Tempest* is being used in every format in almost

every type of deck. I am always a bit more lenient on artifacts when judging them because of this possibility.

Bull Whip — Bull Whip is a more effective Rod of Ruin, even without its ability to damage players. The problem with cards such as this, is that it is turn five before you can kill any creature. The creatures that you can kill have already been damaging you on the board. Always recognize when the card will actually be able to do good for you when evaluating it.

Ensnaring Bridge — Anything that can hold off my opponents entire creature-based attack has to be looked at. Several decks have the ability to get their hands down in size quickly, and this card could benefit those decks greatly. The ability to completely hold off waves of attackers can mean that this card could be great.

Heartstone — I look at this card and it obviously was meant to be put in a situation-based deck. As a general rule, this card would be bad, but in the right deck, such as a Sliver deck, this card would make all of



those neat abilities very easy to use, and still cast spells. I can't see having more than one or two in a deck, however, and even then it might be not versatile enough to play.



Horn of Greed — A global effect that is far too unpredictable to count on. If you build a deck around it, the deck will probably be very weak against the general field.

Hornet Cannon — A smaller Hive that does not allow you to build up. This is going to limit its effectiveness in Constructed decks. It can infinitely block a large creature, but then again, so can Change of Heart.



Jinxed Ring — This card would be used in a creature based deck, but as we look at the available cards, Jinxed Idol is simply better. Jinxed Idol does more damage and does it every turn regardless of the situations that occur.



Mox Diamond — Not a brother, but definitely a relative to the Moxes. This card will be one of the most popular cards in the set, and for good reason. Anything that can speed up your mana base this quickly has to be good. There are going to be countless ways that this going to be used, and I don't even dare get into them now.



Portcullis — A very interesting ability, and there might be many ways it can be used. One thing about evaluating a set for the first time is that there are many cards where there is no right and wrong. All you can truly do is try and see if there are similar cards in the environment, and look at the history of the game. When neither one of these gives you information, you have to at least test the card out to see if it has any possibilities.



Shifting Wall — Even the artifact walls are solid. This card would provide creature defense no matter when you needed it. It is so flexible, I don't believe that there has ever been simply an X card before. I am glad it is a wall.

Sword of the Chosen — Legends are so hard to cast, and there are so few top-class ones, that this card will be unviable.



Volrath's Laboratory — Way too expensive to cast and use to be effective in constructed environments. With that said, I am still going to try it out in control oriented decks. I do this to follow the general rule of testing any card that can create multiple creatures.



The following questions come to mind after evaluating the artifacts:

Is Ensnaring Bridge one of the next great defensive cards?

Can Mox Diamonds become so good that they are considered for banning?

Stronghold Land

Volrath's Stronghold — This could be an excellent card in many decks. The ability to get certain creatures back from your graveyard can be very beneficial in many circumstances. The first thing that pops into my mind is Bottle Gnomes and Necropotence.

SUMMARY

As you go down the list of new cards from *Stronghold*, you see how my mind works when evaluating cards from new sets. The same logic in deciding whether these cards are good or bad can be applied to any card set no matter how long it has been out. Having a shortlist of cards that are potentially viable saves you hours when trying to make decks over the next few months, and most importantly, it saves you from uttering the phrase, "Oh I forgot about that card."

These questions will help serve as general guidelines when evaluating a new or existing set. While it can never take the place of playtesting, it can help accelerate your testing process, and give you multiple new ideas to work with. Do not be afraid to check your list often — we are all human, and prone to have rated too highly or have missed a card that just didn't make sense the first time we looked at it.

Remember these general principals when evaluating cards:

- 1 Is there any card in existence that could give me some indication on how this card is going to perform?
- 2 What is the casting cost of this card in relation to other cards like it in the environment?
- 3 If it is creature removal, is it going to be effective almost every time I have it in my hand?
- 4 Is the card a completely new concept that should be explored?
- 5 Can it be reused multiple times?
- 6 Does it break the mana curve for a creature of its casting cost?
- 7 Does it rely on other cards or special situations to make it effective?
- 8 Will it help me gain control of the game situation, or will it simply sit on the board serving an auxiliary function?
- 9 What kind of decks out there would the card fit into? If none exist, are there other cards that would fit well with it?
- 10 Does it provide immediate or long-term card advantage?
- 11 If it has life-gaining ability, how does it compare to Bottle Gnomes or Gerrard's Wisdom?
- 12 If it helps accelerate my mana base, how does it compare to existing cards such as Rampant Growth and Harrow?
- 13 If it is a direct damage card, can it damage both my opponent and their creatures?
- 14 Is there a surprise factor involved with the card that will increase its effectiveness?

Sealed Deck Strategy

The first time I participated in a Sealed Deck game, I knew that I had found my new favorite form of **Magic**. This was before draft had been invented, and before individuals mastered the techniques of the Limited environment. I was in my card shop, and a player walked in and told me of this new form of **Magic** that he had encountered in a trip to California. You take a Sealed Deck and a booster, and are supposed to make a forty card deck out of it. I glanced at him for a moment and thought, what the heck, I'll try anything once. Maybe it was the freshness of the game. Maybe it was the strategy involved. Or maybe it was my Zephyr Falcon beating him down sixteen straight turns. Whatever it was, I knew that my Black Lotus and Moxes were not going to be used much over the next few weeks.

Sealed Deck opened up a doorway called the Limited environment that still has room to be explored. With Sealed Deck, there is an excitement in using cards that would never be used in a constructed deck. The time when we first started playing Sealed Deck I had not played a summon spell for several months. Exploring the array of creatures in **Magic** was just one of the exciting things in Sealed Deck.

Strategies for Sealed Deck tournaments have evolved over the years with each new set. Each set brings a new series of obstacles and challenges with it, from varying spells to new classes of creatures such as shadows. Whatever the set, whatever the



cards are, Sealed Deck almost always comes down to the thirty to forty five minutes one has to build the deck. During this time, one has to evaluate the cards, decide where the strengths of the deck lie, and come up with a final roster. The choices one makes, along with solid game play, will mean victories or losses.

What can one do during this preparation time to create the best Sealed Deck possible? Over the many Sealed Deck tournaments I have played, I have noticed several concepts that help me be consistent in my deck building. They allow me to cover every fundamental concept. In covering each of these areas, I give myself the best possible outcome when building a Sealed Deck.

Black

Dregs of Sorrow, Dark Ritual, 2 Marsh Lurker, Blood Pet, Dauthi Slayer, Disturbed Burial, Gravedigger, Diabolic Edict, Dauthi Horror, Darkling Stalker, Dauthi Embrace, Leeching Lcid, Kezzerdrix

Blue

Duplicity, Spell Blast, Shimmering Wings, Shadow Rift, 2 Sea Monster, Legerdemain, Winged Sliver, Manta Riders, Horned Turtle, Giant Crab

Green

Elven Warhound, Horned Sliver, Apes of Rath, Rampant Growth, Seeker of Skybreak, Skyshroud Ranger, Evish Fury, Tranquility, Pincher Beetles, Canopy Spider, Heartwood Dryad, Trained Armadon, Rootbreaker Wurm, Skyshroud Troll, Frog Tongue, Trumpeting Armadon

Red

Stone Rain, Flowstone Giant, Sandstone Warrior, Blood Frenzy, Kindle, Sudden Impact, Firefly, Lightning Blast, Rolling Thunder, Aftershock

White

Soltari Crusader, Angelic Protector, Circle of Protection: Green, Circle of Protection: Red, Circle of Protection White, Advance Scout, Disenchant, Worthy Cause, Quickenings Lcid, Pacifism, Soltari Lancer

Multi-color

Ranger-en-Vec, Spontaneous Combustion

Artifact

Metallic Sliver, Phyrexian Splicer, Squee's Toy, Scroll Rack

Land

4 Swamps, 5 Plains, 4 Mountains, 4 Forests, 5 Islands



Some of the initial contents

**The deck I initially build is:**

Darkling Stalker
Trumpeting Armadon
Skyshroud Troll
Apes of Rath
Trained Armadon
Pincher Beetles
Canopy Spider
Firefly
Elvish Fury
Diabolic Edict
Disturbed Burial
Dregs of Sorrow
Dauthi Horror
Dauthi Slayer
Gravdigger
Kezzerdrix
2 Marsh Lurker
Spontaneous Combustion
Kindle
Lightning Blast
Rolling Thunder

Let us first open up a *Tempest* starter and two *Tempest* boosters to see what we have to work with. Using the deck construction process, I will cover the major areas of Sealed Deck strategy and how they apply to this deck.

The first thing I do is open up the packs and separate them into color by casting cost. This only takes a few minutes, and gives you a proportional idea of where your deck is. I then immediately build the best deck I can without thinking about anything. I go with what feels right before I start doing any in-depth analysis about what I have to work with.

These are the cards and colors that first stand out to me while looking at this deck. I give myself room for 18 mana spots, and have an initial forty card deck. I do not believe that I have ever played more than 40 cards in a Sealed Deck before. I hold to the old school logic that I

The deck I refine it to is:

- Darkling Stalker
- Trumpeting Armodon
- Skyshroud Troll
- Apes of Rath
- Trained Armadon
- Pincher Beetles
- Canopy Spider
- Firefly
- Elvish Fury
- Diabolic Edict
- Disturbed Burial
- Dregs of Sorrow
- Dauthi Horror
- Dauthi Slayer
- Gravdigger
- Kezzerdrix
- 2 Marsh Lurker
- Spontaneous Combustion
- Kindle
- Lightning Blast
- Rolling Thunder

want the best chance possible to pull that Rolling Thunder, Dregs of Sorrow, or other key card within the deck. Playing 41 cards decreases the chance of drawing those cards slightly. It may only be slightly, but it still decreases the odds.

After making the deck, I go over my mental checklist of concepts to make sure I am building the appropriate deck.

CREATURE REMOVAL

Rarely can a Sealed Deck do well without any creature removal. There are some unlikely circumstances where it can work, the most obvious being when you can manage to overwhelm your opponent with just sheer numbers. Obviously, if you attempt this strategy, you will be using several creatures that aren't normally used. In *Tempest*, this is even less likely to happen than normally. In the environment, there are too many

solid creatures for you to overwhelm your opponent using sub-optimal, small creatures. Blood Pet just can't cover the distance. Therefore, you need a good combination of removal and solid creatures.

The best one-for-one creature removal spells are the ones that are the least restrictive. Cards like Dark Banishing and Lightning Blast are more versatile than situation removal spells like Diabolic Edict, Deadshot, and Enfeeblement. There are still restrictions on all of these cards, but due to the nature of the creatures in this format, they are the removal spells with the fewest weaknesses. However, they are not the most powerful, because they cannot single-handedly win you the game.

They just even things up a little.

Sweeping creature removal spells like Rolling Thunder and Evincar's Justice are the best cards in the environment. Anytime you can kill two or more of your opponents creatures with one card, you are getting a major advantage. Although card advantage isn't extremely important in Sealed Deck, board control is. If you each have two creatures, and you kill both of his, you are going to attack and damage him that turn, and gain complete board





control. This puts a major time constraint on your opponent. If his hand is empty, he doesn't have long to draw something substantial.

I never like to have more creature removal than creatures in my deck. The main problem with decks that have too much creature removal is the fact that some of

the removal spells are situation based, and mismatches will definitely occur. A couple of worst case scenarios would be:

You are at 2, he has a Fireslinger in play and you have a Pacifism in your hand

He plays a Rootbreaker Wurm, and you are holding an Enfeeblement and a Kindle

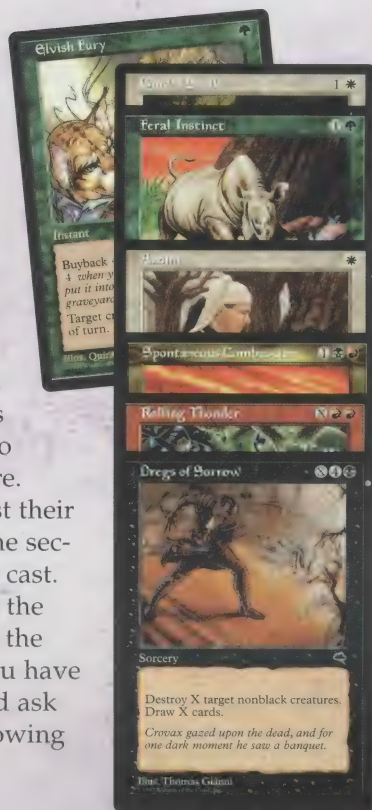
Often time you will have indirect creature removal spells that serve as tricks. Tricks are very important in any limited format, as they allow you to gain card advantage and/or board advantage.

When I refer to tricks, I mean instants that can suddenly turn the tables like Elvish Fury, Guided Strike, Feral Instinct, and Anoint. In *Tempest*, many of these trick cards come with buyback. The buyback tricks are very good cards, because you can either use them for board control —



throwing away an Elvish Fury to kill his creature — or for board control and card advantage — same situation, but you buyback the Elvish Fury.

The hardest part of Sealed Deck is knowing when to remove a creature. Many people cast their removal spells the second a creature is cast. Often, this is not the right play. If it is the second game, you have to think back and ask yourself the following questions:



- 1 What tricks was he playing with?
- 2 How many creature enchantments did I see?
- 3 Is that creature a real threat?
- 4 How many other cards do I have to deal with that creature?
- 5 Is there any creature in his deck that I should save this for?
- 6 If I kill that creature, how much can I attack him for next turn?
- 7 What are the life totals?

The Sealed Deck on page 78 has several excellent removal spells, including three that can kill!

several of your opponent's creatures. It also has an Elvish Fury, which can mean creature removal in some situations. The deck has the ability to play a creature that is hard to remove, and clear its path. If your opponent ever overextends, you can completely wreck him with the Spontaneous Combustion, Dregs of Sorrow, or the Rolling Thunder. This makes the deck scrub-proof, as long as you don't get a really bad draw. After reviewing these principles, I do not believe that any changes should be made based on creature elimination principles.

Creatures

Creatures are how every Sealed Deck game is won. It's not always easy to judge the true value of a creature, as it usually depends on the environment you are playing in. If you happen to be playing *Ice Age Block Sealed Deck*, a Storm Crow is usually considered a pretty decent card, due to the lack of fliers, and the defensive nature of the ground creatures. In *Mirage Block*, a one-powered flier is pretty useless. The creatures hit too hard in this format, and there are numerous ways to deal with fliers. Practice within the environment will help you gauge the effectiveness of creature types.



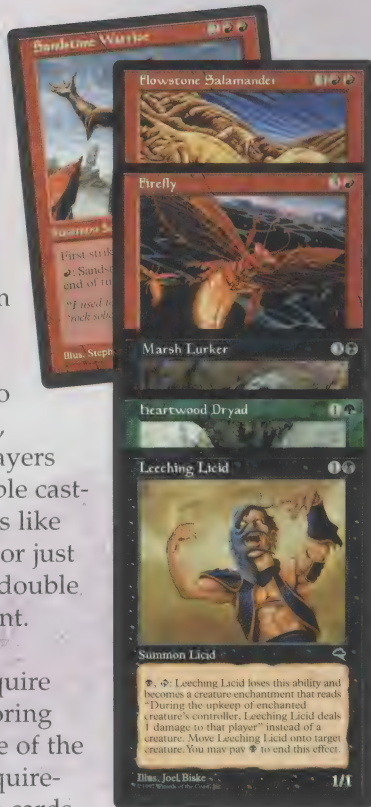
One consistent quality in Sealed Deck creatures is evasiveness. It is extremely important that you have evasive creatures. Once the ground is locked up and neither of you can attack each other successfully, the game comes to a complete halt. Evasive creatures will help you get around these situations. Whether it's flying, shadow, landwalking, or just outright unblockability, it will put a definite time limit on your opponent. Needless to say, you'd be in

a very strong position with multiples of these creatures in play.

Once you've picked your colors, take all of your creatures aside. Lay them in piles according to their casting costs, in a manner that allows you to see all of the cards. This is your mana curve. You want to play a creature every turn after the first, and that is why you need a good mix of varying casting cost creatures. In our example deck, you'll notice the lack of creatures to cast on turn three, which will be a major problem with the deck. Ideally, you would like a nice bell-shaped curve, centering on three mana, and trailing off at five or so. In Sealed Deck, you generally don't want any one mana creatures, unless they will be good late game, like Granger Guildmage. The two mana slot is important; if you have nothing to play turn two, you will often start the game off in a defensive position. The three and four mana slots are the slots that most viable Sealed Deck creatures fall into. It is important that any creature occupying these slots has an incredible special ability wherever possible, or that it is able to handle other creatures of the same casting cost. The five mana slot is sometimes left empty, because in most formats these creatures are uncommons or rares. The trouble with five mana creatures is that if you have more than two or three in a deck, you are likely to be eaten alive by an early swarm of two and three mana creatures. Almost every creature that costs more than six mana is unplayable, unless your deck is really weak. In that situation, you might play with a Crash of Rhinos, but this would be only under desperate circumstances.



Double-casting cost creatures like Flowstone Giant and Trained Armodon are generally considered weaker creatures, which needs to be taken into consideration when picking what cards to play with. Often, you see good players leaving out double casting cost creatures like Sandstone Warrior just because it has a double mana requirement. These cards are playable, but require that you be majoring the color because of the double mana requirement. Late game cards like Flowstone Salamander can be played with six of the appropriate mana.



In our sample deck the creatures we have chosen give us three creatures at two mana, two at three mana, and nine creatures at four mana. I am happy with the quantity of creatures, but the number of creatures at the four mana slot is simply too high. Looking over the deck, it does not appear that we are going to play as many red cards so the Firefly is a logical choice to cut. Eliminating one of the two Marsh Lurkers gives us two additional slots for smaller creatures. Out the choices we have I feel that Heartwood Dryad and Leeching Lizard would be the best choices. Heartwood Dryad also gives us a level of defense against Shadow creatures and Leeching Lizard can be an extremely effective defensive card. In the end I would like a few more crea-

tures — such as Rootwalla — to cast at three mana, but in Sealed Deck you take what you are given.

Mana

I have left eighteen mana slots open to choose from. In Sealed Deck you get five additional mana to add to the mana you already have, so usually you are fine. Ideally I would want to play with seven Forests and seven swamps but that is not going to be possible, because we only start with four of each. As we look over the contents of our Sealed Deck we see a Rampant Growth which will help us round out what will end up being a shaky mana curve.



In most Sealed Decks, 17 mana slots is the right amount. However, in my sample deck, I have chosen to play with 18 mana slots because Dregs of Sorrow and Rolling Thunder both get progressively better with more mana. If they were just high casting cost creatures, 17 land would be appropriate. However, the deck needs to hit four mana to cast the majority of its creatures, so the 18 land would compliment that part of the deck as well.

This gives us a working mana base of seven Forests, six Swamps and four Mountains. Although a deck with only four mountains might have problems casting a Rolling Thunder, this deck does have a rampant growth to help out. As I look over the contents of the deck, I notice the Scroll Rack which will help getting the double red. The Scroll Rack also doubles as card manipulation which can be very useful. Finding a card to cut at this point can be very difficult and I do not want to touch my creature base. Looking over the other spells there are I find

myself leaning towards cutting Diabolic Edict. It is the least reliable of the creature elimination spells. I would never do that if it wasn't for the solid creature elimination spells that remain

In previous formats, I found myself playing with seven and six mana of my base colors, and then five of another color all of the time.

However, in the *Tempest* environment, which has a lot more double casting cost creatures, I prefer to have two primary colors, and a definite minor color. This is possible because in *Tempest* there are more playable cards. Often I play four land of a color in *Tempest*, and minor just the best spells — that are usually all single casting cost — and cards that are good late game.

Second String Spells

I am very happy with the opening deck, and would love to play it in any major tournament. At this point in constructing a deck I always double check the remaining cards to see if there is anything I have missed. This also gives me a chance to set aside cards that are likely to be sideboarded. Among these, and when I would bring them in, are:

Aftershock: There is no other means in the deck to remove an artifact. Because red is the color we are going to minor in, I would only bring it in if I had seen an extremely powerful artifact such as Cursed Scroll, Torture Chamber or Helm of Possession.

Tranquility: This is a card that I almost always bring in game two during Sealed Deck matches. Even if a player was not playing white they often bring it in for Circles of Protection.



These cards only made it to the sideboard deck

Black

2 Darkling Stalker, 1 Diabolic Edict, 1 Rats of Rath, 1 Dauthi Ghoul, 1 Evincar's Justice, 1 Screeching Harpy, 1 Sadistic Glee, 1 Marsh Lurker, 1 Disturbed Burial, 1 Coercion, 1 Clot Sliver, 1 Spinal Graft

Blue

1 Legacy's Allure, 2 Giant Crab, 1 Shimmering Wings, 1 Capsize, 1 Interdict, 1 Thalagos Dreamsower, 1 Twitch, 1 Winged Sliver, 1 Thalagos Sentry, 1 Counterspell, 1 Thalagos Mistfolk

Green

1 Eladamri, Lord of Leaves, 2 Rootbreaker Wurm, 1 **Trained Armadon**, 1 **Crazed Armadon**, 1 Heartwood Treefolk, 1 Choke, 1 Scragnoth, 1 Bayou Dragonfly, 1 Pincher Beetles, 1 Skyshroud Elf, 1 Broken Fall

Red

1 **Lightning Blast**, 1 Aftershock, 1 Hand to Hand, 1 Enraging Lcid, 1 Shatter, 1 Giant Strength, 1 **Wall of Diffusion**, 1 **Kindle**, 1 **Mogg Fanatic**, 1 Stun, 1 Sandstone Warrior

White

1 COP White, 1 COP Black, 1 COP Green, 1 Light of Day, 1 Pegasus Refuge, 1 Oracle en-Vec, 1 Clergy en-Vec, 1 Talon Sliver, 1 Armored Pegasus, 1 Elite Javeliner, 1 Pacifism, 1 Master Decoy

Artifacts

1 Lotus Petal, 1 **Bottle Gnomes**, 1 **Patchwork Gnomes**, 1 **Coiled Tinvip**, 1 **Mogg Cannon**, 1 **Metallic Sliver**

Multi-colored

1 Ranger en-Vec

Land

5 Mountains, 5 Swamps, 4 Islands, 4 Forests, 4 Plains, 1 Rootwater Depths

Phyrexian Splicer: If the deck I am playing against has a high volume of Fliers or Shadow creatures I will probably bring in the Splicer.

Elvish Warhounds: I have had very little success with the Warhounds in game one of tournaments as against some decks they are simply too slow. Against slower decks they become very effective and would be brought in as such. At this point, unless you have some psychic feeling, you have a great deck ready to play. Sometimes you are not as fortunate to receive the high-powered deck above but will have to make do. Such is the luck of Sealed Deck.

Below are a few additional Sealed Decks with commentary on each. The cards in **bold type** are the ones that I selected for the final deck, after considering the issues listed above.



Left: the cards from the second example Sealed Deck, with the ones that made it to the final deck in bold



Deck No. 1

This deck (listed overleaf) seems very similar to the first deck we evaluated. We are faced with the same problems, with too many high casting cost creatures. Fortunately, the artifact creatures help give us a little more balance in the distribution of the creatures. Each color has double casting cost creatures spread throughout, which makes it very difficult to construct a mana base. I ended up playing 17 land in the deck: seven Swamps, six Forests, and four Mountains. This deck will have big problems with anyone who has shadow creatures. Your only real chance would be to try and race him with ground

creatures, which is more than likely going to be quite difficult. This is a deck that I would be very unhappy with. The final decision was whether or not to play with the second Fylamarid and a Sea Monster or the Twitch and the Barbed Sliver. The decision to play with the Twitch and Barbed Sliver was made because we had several good red cards that we wanted early game, like Fireslinger and Kindly. Playing without the Fylamarid and the Sea Monster would allow you to play with seven Swamps, five Islands and five Mountains. Another advantage is that you can play with less double casting cost creatures.

Black

1 Reanimate, 1 Darkling Stalker,
1 Marsh Lurker, 2 Servant of
Volrath, 1 Diabolic Edict,
1 Coffin Queen, 1 Souldrinker,
1 Dread of Night, 1 Evincar's
Justice, 1 Spinal Graft, 1 Clot
Sliver, 1 Disturbed Burial

Blue

1 Tradewind Rider, 1 Volrath's
Curse, 2 Giant Crab, 1 Rootwater
Hunter, 1 Rootwater Matriarch,
1 Fylamarid, 1 Fylamarid, 1 Wind
Dancer, 1 Winged Sliver,
1 Thalagos Sentry, 1 Twitch, 1 Chill,
1 Gaseous Form, 1 Manta Riders,
1 Sea Monster, 1 Shadow Rift

Green

1 Trumpeting Armadon, 1 Bayou
Dragonfly, 1 Winter's Grasp,
1 Skyshroud Elf, 1 Natural
Spring, 1 Respite, 1 Reality
Anchor, 1 Elvish Fury, 1 Broken
Fall, 1 Pincher Beetles

Red

1 Shatter, 2 Kindle, 1 Barbed
Sliver, 1 Wall of Diffusion,
1 Giant Strength, 1 Ancient
Ruins, 1 Heart Sliver, 1 Crown of
Flames, 1 Mogg Conscripts,
1 Fireslinger, 1 Blood Frenzy

White

2 Elite Javeliners, 1 Cloudchaser
Eagle, 1 Invulnerability, 1
Armored Pegasus, 1 Clergy en-
Vec, 1 COP Shadow, 1 Soltari
Foot Soldier, 1 Disenchant

Multi-colored

1 Vhati il-Dal, 1 Spontaneous
Combustion

Artifacts

1 Jet Medallion, 1 Phyrexian
Hulk, 1 Lotus Petal, 1 Metallic
Sliver

Land

1 Ghost Town, 5 Islands,
5 Forests, 4 Swamps, 4 Plains,
4 Mountains

**Deck No. 2**

This next deck has a good bell curve distribution, however there are a few too many cards at the high end of the curve.

Although the Giant Crabs are not particularly good, they are really needed in this deck because it lacks generic 3/3 creatures. The Gaseous Form is being used because of the lack of shadow creatures in this deck.

This is an all-around solid deck, with some interesting late game finishers like Tradewind Rider and Disturbed Burial.

Left: the next deck, with the final cards marked

**Deck No. 3**

This deck is by far the most powerful of the decks opened, and is unlikely to lose any game in

Black

1 Dark Ritual, 1 Rats of Rath,
1 Shyshroud Vampire, 1 Dauthi
Horror, 1 Endless Scream,
1 Perish, 1 Gravedigger,
1 Extinction, 1 Dauthi Marauder,
1 Coercion, 1 Dauthi Mercenary

Blue

1 Rootwater Hunter, 1 Fighting
Drake, 1 Wind Drake, 1 Time
Ebb, 1 Sea Monster, 1 Thalakos
Seer, 1 Shimmering Wings,
1 Manta Riders, 1 Thalakos Sentry

Green

1 Rampant Growth, 1 Reap,
1 Frog Tongue, 2 Skyshroud Elf,
1 Shyshroud Troll, 1 Spike Drone,
1 Reality Anchor, 1 Flailing Drake,
1 Seeker of Skybreak, 1 Pincher
Beetles, 1 Rootwalla, 1 Respite

Red

1 Havoc, 1 Blood Frenzy, 1 Wild
Wurm, 1 Mogg Conscripts,
1 Rolling Thunder, 1 Kindle,
1 Sudden Impact, 1 Mogg Raider,
1 Lowland Giant, 1 Chaotic Goo,
1 Ancient Runes, 1 Wall of
Diffusion, 1 Shatter, 1 Crown of
Flames, 2 Lightning Elemental

White

1 Soltari Foot Soldier, 1 Circle of
Protection: Shadow, 1 Soltari
Lancer, 1 Disenchant, 1 Armor
Sliver, 1 Circle of Protection:
Black, 1 Anoint, 1 Circle of
Protection: Green, 1 Worthy
Cause, 1 Soltari Trooper

Multi-colored

1 Segmented Wurm

Artifact

1 Phyrexian Splicer, 1 Puppet
Strings, 1 Coiled Tinvipr, 1 Altar
of Dementia, 1 Thumbscrews,
1 Torture Chamber, 1 Manakin,
1 Squee's Toy

Land

5 Swamps, 5 Forests, 4 Plains,
4 Islands, 4 Mountains

which Torture Chamber comes into play in the early game. The bell curve is perfect, and all of the support spells are solid. Under most circumstances, several of the black spells require double black mana to cast. Fortunately, the early game creatures in this deck all require only one black mana to cast.

This allows you to lower the amount of swamps you play. However, in this deck it is not necessary, because none of the other colors are really mana dependent. At the last minute, I cut the Disenchant to play with the Phyrexian Splicer. I do not usually play with this card, however it might work particularly well in this deck. It would compliment the Lightning Elementals by giving them a decent ability like shadow, or first strike. It will also assist your shadow creatures in getting through. You can take shadow away from his creature, give it to your guy without shadow, and make an unblockable attack. The only problem with this deck is that it could get hurt pretty bad by a card like Fireslinger or Rootwater Hunter if it is not dealt with immediately.



Two possible antidote cards to the deck listed on the left

SUMMARY

Sealed deck seems to be losing popularity to the draft formats in many areas, but it will remain a tournament format as long as we continue to tap mana. The secrets of Sealed Deck can be unlocked more easily than any other format. If you are an intermediate to new Magic player I would suggest that you devote a large percentage of your Magic playing time to Sealed Deck — it'll help you to get the best results.

Draft Tournaments

As Sealed Deck became a popular tournament format, many players started to make a similar complaint — there was too much luck involved. While players could manipulate their decks in order to achieve optimal results, they were still left to use what fate had given them. The desirability of limited formats was intense, but **Magic** players wanted something more. The draft format was created to fill this need. Each time you play **Magic: the Gathering** you use a separate set of skills to achieve victory. There is no tournament type that requires you to possess more of these skills than draft formats.

When you sit down with seven other **Magic** players to compete in a draft, you are about to participate in the format that produces the most consistent results in **Magic: the Gathering**. The players with more experience and skill will win at this format. The question is, what set of skills does one need to obtain in order to succeed in the draft format? There are only a few, but in order to master them you must possess a strong dedication to the game.



The two cards that forced white to become a major force in draft tournaments



KNOWING THE ENVIRONMENT

The first thing one needs when going into a draft is a knowledge of the environment. Much like constructed deck formats, the draft formats are an ever changing environment. Different sets bring new cards and new strategies. A prime example of this was when *Weatherlight* was added to the *Mirage/Visions* block.

Before *Weatherlight*, the color of white was considered to be very average in the *Mirage/Tempest* format. With the addition of two key cards, Heavy Ballista and Imperial Armor, white became a major force in the environment. Many players would draft white early in order to have a chance at these powerful cards when the *Weatherlight* pack was opened. Knowing the environment and the available cards is very important to determining the strategy you will use once the draft begins.

How does one gain the knowledge of the environment that they are going to participate in? The best way is simply to practice. Regular practice will make you familiar with the environment and which colors are strong. The second thing that you can do is break down the sets into three levels, common, uncommon, rare, and evaluate them. Seventy percent of the cards that you draft will be common, so the commons are the area you need to concentrate on. An example of this is when you look at the *Tempest* commons; you see that a very high percentage of creatures have



Two very valuable *Tempest* draft cards

a toughness of one. This makes cards like Fireslinger and Rootwater Hunter even more valuable than they would otherwise be.

Having this information will be extremely valuable, as it will give you a game plan each time you draft. You will be looking for concepts and themes rather than just good cards.

THE DRAFT

So, you have practiced daily and have every card in the format memorized and evaluated. This is going to be very helpful, but ultimately worthless unless you can succeed at the draft itself. In order to master the game, you will need to develop a strategy — and in Rochester draft, this will be dependent on what position in the draft you are given. What that strategy is depends on the draft format. There are two main types of tournament draft formats, Booster and Rochester.

The Booster Draft

The Booster Draft is one of the most popular formats in **Magic: the Gathering**. Every player opens a booster simultaneously, chooses a card, and passes the remainder to the person next to them, who chooses and passes it again, and so on. The seating order in Booster Draft is actually inconsequential, as all players are opening up their packs simultaneously. I want to walk through the first few selections of a Booster Draft to highlight the most important



strategies a player should be aware of.

The draft begins, and you open up your first pack. Let us use *Tempest* for an example, as it is the most used set in Draft formats these days. You open up the pack and see Rolling Thunder, Marsh Lurker, Dark Banishing, Skyshroud Troll, Legacy's Allure, and remaining cards that do not appear to be as powerful as the others. You only get to pick one of these, so it is vital to pick the correct one. Many players at this point see the card they want and pass the pack without thinking about anything else. This is the most common mistake made by players in draft. You should not only make the best selection for yourself, but realize what cards you are passing to the players on your left. These cards will influence their initial decisions, and thus influence your draft when the draft switches directions.

In this opening pack, I would take the Rolling Thunder, as massive creature elimination spells such as Rolling Thunder, Evincar's Justice, Spontaneous Combustion, etc. are always at a premium. I remember the cards



that I am passing to the left, and among them are premium black and blue spells. The packs are then passed, and I receive a new pack from the person on my right. As I look in the pack, I see Fireslinger, Gravedigger, Trumpeting Armadon, and no other extremely powerful card. At this point I am very happy with the Fireslinger as it serves as creature control in the environment. These first few picks are usually dedicated to ways to handle your opponent's creatures. As I look over the pack, I realize that I am passing another solid black and green card, but to this point I have not passed a significant white or red card. This brings me to the principle of cutting off a color.

THE BOOSTER DRAFT PRINCIPLE — CUTTING OFF A COLOR

In draft, one of your most important goals is to draft a two color deck. If you can draft a Mono-color deck then you're the man, but you never want to get into three or more colors, as you will develop mana problems through the course of playing. If I can completely limit one or more colors to the individuals on my left, I stand a very good chance of getting those colors passed back to me when the draft reverses order. This will strengthen my deck tremendously, and therefore I try to dictate in the first few picks what colors the players to the left of me are drafting.

In this example, I have not passed a significant red card, and if I hold true to this strategy, I will not for the remainder of the opening set of packs. As my opponents to the left of me evaluate their decks after the first pack, they will notice that they are short on red. This will greatly increase my chance of getting quality red cards later than I normally would during the next pack. If you can significantly do this to one or more colors, you will leave the draft with a superior deck.



The draft continues

The next pack comes round, and we see Dauthi Slayer, Sandstone Warrior, Trained Armadon, and Dark Banishing again. These next few picks are very critical, as they will almost inevitably dictate the remainder of the draft. At this point you need to realize what you are not being passed. We have not been passed a significant blue or white card. We can make the educated guess that the individual to the right is drafting one, or both, of those colors. We can also determine that they are not playing black or red, by the quality cards in those colors that are being passed to you. In this situation we can make one of two picks, the Dark Banishing or the Sandstone Warrior. If you are extremely dedicated to cutting off red, pick the Sandstone Warrior. From the Dark Banishing being passed, you can surmise that more Black cards are coming your way, and this is too versatile a card to pass up: Always be aware of the gifts you receive, as they are an indicator of what is to come.



Questions to ask yourself early on in the draft

At this point in the draft you need to realize which direction your deck is heading. Is it offensive or defensive? The deck we are drafting here is looking to be offensive, so it will influence our picks from later packs. An offensive deck is going to be far more likely to pick a Mogg Raider than a defensive deck, as it helps the chemistry of the deck. A defensive deck is more likely to draft a Circle of Protection or Gaseous Form, as it will aid their strategy. All cards are not meant for all decks.

This draft is opening up in the ideal way. We are getting strong cards off of the bat and it seems that the trend will continue. The next pack is passed and the only significant cards are a Dauthi Horror, Marsh Lurker and another Trained Armadon. At this point we are pretty sure that we will not see any blue or white cards from the person on our right. We have the choice at this point between two black creatures. In the *Tempest* environment there are three levels of battle: ground, shadow and flying. Evasive creatures have always been at a premium in limited environments. In a creature-heavy environment, the ability to get around that wall, regenerating creature or fatty has always been necessary to win matches. Shadow creatures give you that evasive ability, while at the same time protecting you from other shadow creatures, so the Dauthi Horror is a must. I try to draft shadows whenever possible.



This card is an irresistible pick



The draft proceeds, and we continue to round out our deck with cards. In the next few packs we pick up a variety of creature cards to round out the deck. There will be many subtle decisions to make however, as generally in picks six through ten you are going to be faced with defensive draft choices. These are picks that you make in order to prevent an opponent from strengthening their deck.



I am a firm believer that you build your deck first, and then do what you can to strengthen it. Many times, however, you are faced with choices between cards that will not help your deck in any way. If I am playing Mono-red and there is a Chill or Circle of Protection: Red to pick, then I might pick that over a marginal creature in the middle picks. Am I going white/green and there is nothing to help my deck? If so, I will take the best available card in the colors that I have been predominately passing. By making your opponent's deck weaker, in turn you make yours stronger.

Emergency decisions

What happens if, after the first pack, you see that in the fifteen cards you have drafted, your selections are spread out between every color?

Sometimes this happens, as drafting is not a perfect science.

You have an opening to pick Evincar's Justice, but no other black, or a Capsize but no other blue.

At this point, you need to try to figure out what is going to be passed to you, and build the best deck possible. Getting out of a color is a common occurrence in drafting, and the sooner you realize that things are not going the way you desire, the better. If you pick that opening-pack Rolling Thunder and follow it up with a Fireslinger but the red does not come for the remainder of the first packs, you should be very careful what you select in the next group of packs. If no red comes in the first two picks, jump ship before you're trapped, and go on to what is being passed to you.

During the draft, how do you know if you are building a good deck? A good measure is if the



first six picks in each pack are cards that are going into your deck for sure, then your deck will generally be solid. If you look at the first six cards and see a variety of cards that include many iffy ones, you can't afford to do any defensive drafting at any point, and need to hope for a little luck. Remember to be careful with the first six picks, and your decks will be better.

THE ROCHESTER DRAFT — A SAMPLE ROUND

In Rochester draft, one pack is opened at a time. The first player takes a card and passes the pack round to the next player, who picks and passes the remainder on, and so on. The last player in the round takes two cards, and passed the pack back the way it came. Everyone else takes a second card in turn, except for the person who drew first. Then a pack is opened by the player who went second during the previous round, and the process continues until every player has had an equal number of chances to pick first. While this obviously works best with eight players and a 15-card booster pack (which is the standard format), there are ways to make it work for any number of players — to make it fit, each round you simultaneously open and mix enough booster packs of the same expansion or edition to give you at least twice as many cards as there are players. For four players, one eight-card booster would be sufficient; for five players, you would want one fifteen-card booster or two eight-card boosters. If there are cards left over after everyone has had two picks (apart from the person who went first, remember!), just set them aside. Formal Rochester draft tournaments will nearly always involve tables of eight players each.

We are going to run a mock Rochester draft, draft two of the positions, and go through what you should do in each of the positions. We are going to draft the fourth and seventh positions for eight packs, to see how a draft develops before a player's eyes. When I sit down, one of



my goals is to try and memorize every card that is drafted, so I not only know what people are playing, but try to use the cards they are drafting against them. If I know what the person to my right is drafting, I will be able to use this information to make calculated guesses to what their next move is going to be. More importantly, you will see what other decks are being drafted, and be able to counter-draft against their decks. An example of this happened in a recent draft I participated in.

I was in the first position, one I am not very fond of, and as the draft progressed, I could tell that there were two very strong decks developing on the table. Both of these decks were heavily drafting Shadow creatures, and my green/red deck had few ways of dealing with Shadow at the time. I knew that these two decks would be my main competition, so I started drafting what many considered questionable picks at the time. I chose Heartwood Dryads, Reality Anchor, and Wall of Diffusion, when there were more powerful cards to draft at the time. When playing began, I was able match up very well with the two shadow decks and win my table, because of the drafting strategy.

This mock draft is being run with six other players in my area to simulate the best results. We are going to be drafting the fourth and seventh positions to provide the most commentary possible. We are going to run a *Tempest*-only draft, and while the results might differ for each environment, the principles behind the draft techniques demonstrated remain the same. The card name is listed after the position number that drafted it.



The first pack opens:

Elvish Fury, Disenchant, Disturbed Burial, Lightning Blast, Dauthi Marauder, Soltari Lancer, Metallic Sliver, Clot Sliver, Stalking Stones, Rootwater Matriarch, Reckless Spite, Segmented Wurm, Circle Blue, Thalagos Sentry, Skyshroud Elf

- 1st — Lightning Blast
- 2nd — Reckless Spite
- 3rd — Disturbed Burial



Picking fourth is my favorite position in the draft, as I get information of where the people before me are going with their drafts. The individuals ahead of me have picked red, black, and at this point I will not necessarily pick

the best card, in order to cut off a color for the next three packs. I pick the Soltari Lancer at this point. It is a quick, solid creature, and aside from Disenchant it is the only significant white card.

5th — Stalking Stones
6th — Elvish Fury



In the seventh position you can often have your early draft dictated to you, and on your first pick need to simply take a solid card if available.

The pick here is Dauthi Marauder, as it is a solid creature and black is going to be picked presumably by players two and three, and thus cut off to players four and five. Knowing where colors are being drafted on the table can give you a tremendous edge in calculating probability.



8th — Disenchant, Rootwater Matriarch

I take the Segmented Wurm on this pick as it is a solid creature, and even if I don't play it, I will



not have to face it in battle. Defensive drafting occurs normally between picks six and twelve in each pack, as there isn't always a card available for your deck.

6th — Skyshroud Elf
5th — Clot Sliver

In the cleanup picks of the draft, which can be described as picks 10 — 15 in *Tempest*, my number one goal is to make sure that nothing is available to aid my opponents' decks. Often there are cards that do no good at all. I take the Circle of Protection: Blue here, as you never know...

3rd — Thalkos Sentry
2nd — Metallic Sliver

The next pack contains

Tranquility, Dauthi Horror, Counterspell, Fireslinger, Shimmering Wings, Rootwalla, Wind Dancer, Meditate, Angelic Protector, Dismiss, Shatter, Canyon Wildcat, Muscle Sliver, Enfeeblement, Manakin

2nd — Fireslinger
3rd — Counterspell

In the fourth position, we have a few choices depending on the style of the player. We can take the Angelic Protector, as it is the only white card and will aid our continuing block out of white. If

we look over the remaining cards, you can tell that there are going to be



four or five cards picked before it, so the two next to you probably aren't going to draft it, and you will still have a protective circle of two to the right and left not drafting that color. The player two places to the left drafted the Elvish Fury, but green is clear to the right for now. I take the Rootwalla. I hate going green/white normally, but we will see what happens.

- 5th — Canyon Wildcat
- 6th — Muscle Sliver

In the seventh position, I take the Dauthi Horror with a few other good cards around me, and hope that the enfeeblement sneaks through.

- 8th — Meditate
- 1st — Dismiss, Enfeeblement
- 8th — Angelic Protector

I keep the Tranquility on my side with the seventh pick here.

- 6th — Shatter
- 5th — Manakin
- 4th — Wind Dancer
- 3rd — Shimmering Wings

The third pack opens:

Wall of Diffusion, Master Decoy, Manakin, Tranquility, Dauthi Horror, Talon Sliver, Skyshroud Elf, Evincar's Justice, Broken Fall, Coercion, Serene Offering, Mirri's Guile, Leeching Lcid, Thalakos Lowland, Sadistic Glee

- 3rd — Evincar's Justice



We are pretty happy with this pack, as it is relatively weak. This is one of the variables in drafting. Sometimes you will draft the same card first or seventh. There is no way of controlling these, so you learn to deal with them. The Master Decoy is gobbled up here, as it is the only white card of significance, and perhaps the best card available as well.

- 5th — Dauthi Horror
- 6th — Broken Fall

Seventh position doesn't look that strong here as the pack weeds out, but the Coercion will be good against pesky buy-back spells.

- 8th — Thalagos Lowland
- 1st — Wall of Diffusion
- 2nd — Leeching Lcid, Tranquility
- 1st — Mirri's Guile
- 8th — Serene Offering
- 7th — Manakin
- 6th — Skyshroud Elf
- 5th — Talon Sliver
- 4th — Sadistic Glee



The fourth pack opens:

Sea Monster, Mogg Raider, Respite, Dauthi Horror, Manta Riders, Mogg Squad, Emerald Medallion, Charging Rhino, Advanced Scout, Pacifism, Rackless Spite, Stone Rain, Seeker of Skybreak, Enfeeblement, Spell Blast

The pick is relatively easy, as we want to continue to cut off white, and we scoop up Pacifism.



- 5th — Reckless Spite
- 6th — Charging Rhino



The seventh position has been hurt by the quantity of black that there has been in the first few packs. This has put black cards in the hands of many players. Another Dauthi Horror is available, and there appears to be no other route to head. Sometimes you have to stay on course, and hope for the best. From your playtesting, you know that black is the strongest color, and that even if all current players continue to draft black, you will probably be fine.

8th — Spell Blast



First position is in serious trouble at this point in the draft. A blue/white deck is emerging to the immediate right in position eight, and black has gone to the left, with that annoying Fireslinger in the second position that will push the player to red. It is very important to recognize when you are in trouble quite early, or it will be too late. A deck spread out over three colors has little chance of doing well in an advanced field. The player drafting this position does a very smart thing by selecting the Seeker of Skybreak. Taking the quick green creature might allow him to establish the color. I discussed this with the player after the draft, and he told me this was exactly what he was trying to do.

2nd — Enfeeblement
3rd — Sea Monster, Stone Rain

2nd — Mogg Raider
1st — Advanced Scout
8th — Manta Riders



7th — Respite
6th — Emerald Meddalion
5th — Mogg Squad

I have developed a bad habit over the last year of drafting. Whenever I draft last, I always count the cards and try to figure what is going to get to me. I am hoping, in effect, that certain cards will be available when it is my turn. In recent times, I have dedicated myself to concentrating on what players are drafting more, as the pick is normally easy once it gets to me.



The fifth pack opens:

Mounted Archers, Skyshroud Ranger, Natural Spring, Muscle Sliver, Lightning Elemental, Legacy's Allure, Rootwater Diver, Mogg Hollows, Elvish Fury, Flowstone Giant, Flowstone Sculpture, Dark Banishing, Stone Rain, Mogg Raider, Dream Cache

5th — Dark Banishing
6th — Muscle Sliver

At this point the seventh position has only drafted black cards, and with no black cards currently available, it is time to delve into another color. The Legacy is "alluring," but you can be sure that you will see no significant blue cards coming back around the second time. The person immediately to my left will make sure of this. The Flowstone Giant or Lightning Elemental is a more solid pick, as there seems to be a smaller pocket of red around me. I go with the Lightning Elemental.

8th — Legacy's Allure
1st — Flowstone Giant
2nd — Flowstone Sculpture
3rd — Dream Cache

The cutting off of white has worked like a textbook example here, as we get a solid creature, Mounted Archers, on the eighth pick. The fourth



position looks pretty solid right now. The bonus of this is that you also get an Elvish Fury, which is very useful in a green/white deck.

3nd — Stone Rain
2nd — Mogg Raider
1st — Mogg Hollows
8th — Rootwater Diver
7th — Skyshroud Ranger
6th — Natural Spring

The sixth pack opens:

Light of Day, Ruby Medallion, Cinder Marsh, Marsh Lurker, Tranquility, Staunch Defenders, Heartwood Dryad, Dark Ritual, Canopy Spider, Blood Frenzy, Soltari Lancer, Dark Banishing, Cloudchaser Eagle, Horned Turtle, Metallic Sliver

6th — Dark Banishing

The previous pick frustrated me when I was drafting. There is black on his left and right, and he does not have a single other black card, but the Dark Banishing looked good I guess. The one thing when drafting is to expect the unexpected. I draft the Marsh Lurker, but to be completely honest, I did not see the Dark Banishing being cut off from me.



This is something that you will encounter time and time again. Sometimes it will be a player who is drafting the best card they see. Sometimes it will be a player who is specifically trying to keep your deck weak. Whatever the reasoning is, you can expect several things not to go as planned during the course of a draft. Just keep your cool, don't show emotion, and keep on drafting.

- 8th — Staunch Defender
- 1st — Cloudchaser Eagle



I felt sorry for this individual, as there never seemed to be a time where they could take control of the draft. I question this pick as they now have cards in each of the five colors, and no clear direction to where they are going. Don't panic if this person ever happens to be you. If you keep your cool, amazing things can happen in the second half of the draft.

- 2nd — Blood Frenzy
- 3rd — Horned Turtle



The white keeps coming with the Light of Day. This was not the easiest of picks, as I really like shadow creatures, and it was hard to pass up the Soltari Lancer. I chose the Light of Day because of the high amount of black creatures that were in the draft at this point. This was totally a personal preference, as I tend to lean to the defensive in all of my Magic styles.



- 5th — Soltari Lancer, Cinder Marsh
- 4th — Tranquility



- 3rd — Heartwood Dryad
- 2nd — Metallic Sliver
- 1st — Canopy Spider
- 8th — Dark Ritual
- 7th — Ruby Medallion

The seventh pack opens:

Winged Sliver, Darkling Stalker, Frog Tongue, Hero's Resolve, Endless Scream, Rootwalla, Circle of Protection: Black, Blood Pet, Seeker of Skybreak, Enfeeblement, Muscle Sliver, Mogg Canyon, Dauthi Ghoul, Extinction, Staunch Defenders



I am not entirely unhappy in the seventh position right now, as I have five solid black spells, but this pack is clearly disappointing. I am tempted to take the Rootwalla, but I stick to my deck and take an average Enfeeblement. I still have a chance to end up with a nearly solid black deck, and I will continue down that road.

- 8th — Staunch Defenders
- 1st — Rootwalla
- 2nd — Extinction
- 3rd — Darkling Stalker

Defensive drafting is a strategy that many top players believe in, while others will never do it. I really do not want to take the chance of the sixth position getting his third Muscle Sliver in the first round, but I can't avoid the CoP: Black. I have been at drafts where players have been able to get six and seven Muscle Slivers without any player putting up a fight. You will need to decide whether it is worth losing a pick or two to stop a player from accumulating a deck such as this.



- 5th — Hero's Resolve
- 6th — Muscle Sliver, Seeker of Skybreak
- 5th — Endless Scream
- 4th — Winged Sliver
- 3rd — Mogg Canyon
- 2nd — Dauthi Ghoul
- 1st — Blood Pet
- 8th — Frog Tongue



The eighth pack opens:

Dauthi Slayer, Canyon Wildcat, Shadow Rift, Skyshroud Ranger, Elvish Fury, Lightning Elemental, Rootwater Hunter, Dream Cache, Soltari Trooper, Giant Strength, Thalakos Seer, Nuturing Lcid, Searing Touch, Thumbscrews, Dread of Night

- 8th — Rootwater Hunter
- 1st — Searing Touch
- 2nd — Dauthi Slayer
- 3rd — Lightning Elemental



In the position here, we take the Soltari Trooper, and basically finish out the first round of drafting. We have a nice solid white deck, with a wide-open set of possibilities with a second color. We should be getting white coming back, and can minor a second color if needed for creature destruction spells.

- 5th — Canyon Wildcat
- 6th — Elvish Fury

The seventh position's deck is not as strong as fourth position at this point, but that is to be expected. Picking up Dread of Night and Dream Cache defensively round out an above-average first round for this position.



- 6th — Nuturing Lcid
- 5th — Giant Strength
- 4th — Thalakos Seer
- 3rd — Shadow Sift
- 2nd — Skyshroud Ranger
- 1st — Thumbscrews

This gives you an idea of a typical Rochester draft, and of some possible scenarios that you might encounter during the course of the draft. Remember to always be on your toes during a Rochester draft, as a wrong pick can mean a win or a loss.

BUILDING THE DECK

Once you have drafted your deck, it is time to build it. Usually in a tournament, you will have around thirty minutes to build your deck, and this is normally plenty of time, as during the draft you should have been able to tell what direction your deck was going. As you lay your cards out in front of you, set aside the cards that are going into your deck for sure. These should



include creature elimination spells such as Pacifism, Dark Banishing, etc. Then set aside the creatures you consider the best. Next, set aside the cards that can be used as utility cards, such as Disenchant, Capsize, Disturbed Burial and other powerful buyback spells. With these cards you will build the basis of a deck.

If you have a two color deck, you will want 16 to 17 land depending upon the casting cost in your deck.

If you have numerous buyback spells, you may consider going up to 18 land. If you have trouble making decisions on what cards to cut from your deck,



try to remember what cards you passed. Were there a tremendous amount of flyers? If so, Needlestorm makes the cut. Did you see any significant enchantments or artifacts? If you didn't, you shouldn't play with both of the Disenchants that you drafted. These subtle issues are very important.



SUMMARY

I will always love to draft as a pastime, because I find it stimulating and enjoyable. We all know that **Magic** is an ever changing environment, but draft is even more so. Stick eight people in different positions, with the same cards that eight previous individuals drafted, and you will have eight different decks from the time before. It is this freshness that will keep drafts in the tournament scene for years to come.

The Metagame and the Tournament Environment

Recently, I was watching a basketball game with a few newly acquired **Magic** friends, when the subject came around to **Magic**. It is amazing that no matter what you might start to do, **Magic** players will always come back around to the subject of the card game that obsesses us. One of the players, who from my observations had tremendous playing ability, was getting very frustrated at our conversation. "When we are practicing I can beat all of you. I can even beat you, Justice, but why can't I qualify for the Pro Tour?" He leaned back, drank a little more of his beer, and exclaimed "It is all beyond me."

His friends joked a little with him about his manhood when I started probing him to see if I could learn why a player with an ability at least equal to mine had not had success at the highest level of tournament **Magic**. He seemed to have a great grasp for the technical areas of the game and knew rules, timing, and game related matters as well as anyone I ever met. Then came the question, "What do you think about the Metagame?" He expressed his distaste for the whole process, and that alone answered the question for me.

The **Magic** Metagame is as complex as anything I have encountered in competition. It involves the preparation of a professional basketball coach, the discipline of a chess player, the bluffing ability of a poker ace, and sometimes the antics of a professional wrestler. To attempt to break down the Metagame would be akin to analyzing the human psyche itself. With that said, there are some basic principles to the Metagame that should be explored by all.



CHOOSING A DECK

Let us imagine that you have practiced three straight weeks, and it is the night before the tournament. You have decided on a deck, and spent the last week fine-tuning it. You are absolutely positive that this is the deck to play, and you get to the hotel room ready to get a good night's sleep so you can be fresh for the next day. A

teammate walks in and informs you that everyone he has talked to is playing the one deck that you can't beat. Your options at this point are more or less narrowed down to getting a cup of coffee and accepting that you are going to be up for a while.

I do not believe I have ever gotten a good night sleep the night before a major tournament. There is definitely a school of thought that a good night's sleep is important in order to be fresh the next day. My view is that I can sleep when I'm dead, because the night before a tournament is when the **Magic** Metagame starts. The next twenty-four hours are one of the reasons I play the game of **Magic**.

At the Pro Tour, you will find the night before broken down into several different camps of individuals working together to see if their ideas correlate with others on what are the best decks to play. Often, individuals make deals to share this information with others and what sets up is a vast network of information exchanging. I believe that those that involve themselves in this process benefit far more than those who stay huddled in their rooms afraid of sharing their deck ideas with others. How you use this information can vary greatly.

Let us suppose that in the next big tournament everyone that you talk to the night before agrees that deck A is by far the best option. During your playtesting you have come to the same conclusion. You are left with a few options at this point. You can play your deck tuned as much as possible to the 'deck A' concept. You can go the completely opposite route, and play a deck that will defeat 'deck A' a high percentage of the time but will be vulnerable to other decks. Tom Champeng used this latter option in 1996 to become World Champion. He knew that the field was heavily weighted towards Necropotence decks, and played a Mono-white deck which helped him claim the title.



The best opportunity I ever had to use the Metagame the night before a tournament was before US Nationals in 1995. That year we benefited — or I should say I benefited — from being able to change decks the night before the final eight. Going into the final eight were four decks that were Mono-black. Of the other four decks, it was an assortment of red/black and green decks. I was sitting in my room brainstorming ways I could beat Mono-black. I didn't think too many of the final eight would change, as my experience up to that point showed that **Magic** players stick to what they are comfortable with, which still holds true. If the ten principles had been handed down from on high, then I would have been able to look at the list. No list though, and it was getting late at night when my roommate, Joel Unger, whom I had lost to in the finals of Regionals, shed key light on the subject. He said one word — Dervishes. That was all I needed, and the next morning I was trading packs of Legends I had won in the Type One tournament for Dervishes. It paid off, for the first four rounds I played that day were against Mono-black decks. My four standard Dervishes rode me to victory (see Appendix II page 119).

The key is to keep your options open the night before a tournament, and do the best job of networking that is humanly possible. If your results from networking are sketchy, try to make the

best logical decision you can. I have never made a decision on what deck to play until the night before a tournament. Most of the time, I leave it to the morning of the tournament. Sometimes I have guessed correctly, and a few times I have been wrong. You learn from your experiences, and become a better judge of the field with each tournament.

THE MORNING OF THE TOURNAMENT

Many of the things that I am about to write might seem basic and second nature, but they come from the many things I have seen **Magic** players do, or forget to do, that have cost them during the course of the day to come.

If I managed to get any sleep the night before, I always make sure that I get a wake up call and set the alarm. There are dozens of cases of individuals who did not get to the Pro Tour on time because they overslept. I always give myself enough time to shower and get a some coffee or orange juice.

I always try to get to the tournament site an hour before the tournament is supposed to start. Not only does this give you a little time in case you fall behind, but once you are there you can soak in the environment. I believe there is an energy associated with everything, and I try to tap into this energy.

The hour will pass very quickly, but at this point, no matter whom I talk to, I will not divulge any contents of my deck. If I have worked with you as a friend the night before, we will be friends after the tournament again, but once I get to the tournament site I am there to do battle. This is a competitive event, and while I believe in casual fun **Magic**, its place is not here. Whenever I hear individuals complain that opponents will not let them take moves back I am amazed. When I am playing at the professional level, I expect my competitor to be completely professional. This

means professional in their behavior, actions, and game play.

This does not mean that I am being stuffy or offish — I just will not talk about my deck or expect a competitor to do so. Divulging any information about your deck can give a potential opponent the subtle advantage that they need in order to sideboard the correct items. I will not give this advantage away. The weather, sports, how your flight was, these are what I limit my conversations to during this hour.

When the tournament official makes the announcement that the pairings are up, I try to find my seat quickly, as I am practical about where I like to sit. At the Pro Tour in Atlanta, I had my back to the crowd and happened to be playing a gentleman from a different country. He had several of his countrymen watching the game, as it was a very important match. During the entire match, they spoke in their native tongue. While I am sure that they weren't giving signals or communicating in any way, it made me a little uncomfortable. In every match since, I have tried to sit facing the crowd.

THE MATCH BEGINS

With the best pro players, I have noticed a similar characteristic once a game begins. Nothing else in the world matters to them during that hour. They don't care if the world is going to be destroyed at the end of the match. They don't care if Cindy Crawford is giving them the eye, and is holding up a sign that says "let's go party." They don't care if Elvis is back from the grave singing "Hound Dog" in the lobby. Nothing else matters but that match. If you are there, then you are there to win. Winning round after round requires you to play technically perfect **Magic** during the course of each hour.

Does this mean that you are tense and nervous? Of course not. In fact, I do not think there are any



times that I enjoy myself more than during a Pro Tour match. This is the time that I get to do battle with the best **Magic** players in the world. I get to test my resolve, and see if I can defeat my noble opponents. So relax, concentrate, and get ready for battle, because the match is about to begin.

Your goal for each match, aside from winning of course, should be to play the perfect match. I was never that up-to-date on rulings during the first few years of my career, and to be quite frank, I played sloppy **Magic** because of it. I knew the basic rules that every other player does, but was far from a rules guru. I also didn't have the routine that I go through during each turn now. This cost me a chance at the World Championships in 1996.

I was playing Tom Champheng in the finals, and he had won a very close game one. The second game was going well for me, until Tom cast Balance with a Zuran Orb on the table. This left me with one land in my hand and an Ihsan's Shade as well. Unfortunately for me, there were also Two Demonic Consultations in my hand. Not knowing the rules made me very confused at this point, as I tried to think how I could cast two instants at the same time, and how that would result. Not knowing the rules made me completely forget that I could simply tap mana into my pool and wait for each Demonic Consultation to resolve. I cast both Demonic Consultations at the same time, and ended up effectively decking myself.

PERFECT MAGIC — SETTING A ROUTINE

Even if you are not a rules master, you can greatly improve your game and play near-perfect **Magic** by going through the routine that I go through each turn. The first thing I do when I draw my seven cards is evaluate my hand. The Paris Mulligan has been a wonderful addition to tournament play, and allows you to take a

mulligan for any reason. Drawing one less card can be very annoying, but it is often better than the alternative of sitting with too little land or too much. The deck you are playing will greatly determine whether you should take a mulligan or not.

Once you conclude that you have an adequate hand, the next step is to put the correct land down. Too many players just put down a land and tell their opponent to go. You should evaluate not only what is in your hand, also but what you are likely to draw. What in your deck can be cast on turn two? These decisions only take a couple of extra seconds to make, and are part of perfect **Magic**. Did your opponent play with Wastelands in previous games? Maybe laying regular mana at first will help you develop your game.



Once a few lands are played, the decision-making process begins. The point check system I go through is especially helpful in Sealed Deck games, where there are more decisions to be made. First, in each phase I go from left to right and evaluate each card on the board. During upkeep, many players even put something on their library to help them remember the upkeep cost associated with a Waterspout, Stasis or other card. I prefer not to do this, as I find it distracting. Simply doing a point check from left to right



will allow you to consciously evaluate each card, and remind you of any additional abilities or upkeep associated with a certain card.

I make a habit of never laying anything in the main phase before an attack unless it is pertinent to the attack. That might include laying an island to bluff the counterspell, however. Once again, I do the point check system to see if there is anything I should do. Then comes the attack, where in Sealed Deck games almost all mistakes are made.

It is important to know what can be done under an attack, and you should make your decisions accordingly. What abilities does each creature have, and how will they effect the attack? What if the opponent tries to double or triple team one of your creatures? What is the worst scenario that can occur if you attack with one, two, or all

of your creatures? Are you in the position where you can be aggressive and attack, or had you better play cautiously?

The point check system will help you develop a routine where you never make simple mistakes, such as forgetting to poke your opponent with your Prodigal Sorcerer. It is an information routine that will always keep you aware of where you are in the game. However, it will not help you master an opponent.

MASTERING AN OPPONENT

During the course of a match, has an opponent ever drawn a card and asked what life are you at? Either they are bluffing, or in most cases they just drew direct damage. Does your opponent spend more time in your graveyard than playing the game? Do they painstakingly leave two blue mana untapped and make sure that you are aware of it? Do they talk non stop during the match about random events during the game?

The above are all diversionary tactics used by a lot of **Magic** players. Most of the time, they are so transparent that I am amazed anyone falls for them. But they do. I support the theory that **Magic** players are the ultimate doom predictors. It does not matter what is actually in your hand, a **Magic** player will assume that they are the worst cards that could ever exist for them in that situation. Until you prove otherwise, they will assume that if you're playing green, you have a Giant Growth, or if you are playing red, you are holding an Incinerate and perhaps multiple Fireblasts. You need to put yourself in a position where your opponent assumes the worst, but you are completely aware of what your opponent has.

When your opponent draws a card, watch their eyes and facial expressions. I have noticed that there are not too many future academy award winners on the Pro Tour, and you can often tell by



an expression what they have drawn. Sometimes an opponent will try to conceal this and overact. They appear about as sincere as Jerry Springer consoling his guests. Watch their eyes and where they place the card in their hand. Most players in matches do not make very much eye contact, so I try to stay glued on them as much as possible. This is not a stare down, as I will try to conceal that I am monitoring them. If they look up I might ask some simple question or slowly glance down. As long as they are not aware that I am watching, I can maintain this advantage.

So, when they draw their card, where do they place it? Often times, they will simply set it down as land. This lets you know that they do



not have any additional cards to work with during an attack. During the course of a match, if you watch an opponent, you will see signs that might give away certain things about their play pattern. These can be critical when the time comes to make a weighty decision.

At the same time you are doing this, you want to be sure that you are not giving away the same information to an opponent. Close the cards in your hand subtly each time that you draw a card. I don't pretend to be Robert de Niro, so whenever I draw something, I do not try to influence my opponent one way or another. I am simply silent. It is amazing what the power of silence can do. By being as emotionless as possible, it forces your opponent to speculate on the contents of your hand, and make their decisions on play accordingly.

Silence and subtle motions can be very powerful, but they are only part of what can keep your opponent off balance. Playing competitive **Magic** entails more than reading your opponent and not making technical mistakes. Often, there are decisions to be made during the course of a match that there is no textbook answer to. An example of this happened to me while playing Brian Hacker in the Duelist Invitational in Brazil. It was game one of our match, and it came to the point in the game where the game was going to be decided very soon. Brian sensed this as well, and attacked with an Ernham and two other creatures. I was in the position where I was going to kill him in the next turn since he had no blockers left. He had one card in his hand however and Red mana open. If I did not block anything, I was going to be at three life and open to a Lightning Bolt. If I blocked anything, I would not be able to kill him on the proceeding turn. Brian is an excellent player, and I was not going to try to make my decision on his body language, but he did seem awfully silent. This could have meant anything.

It took me a minute to come to my conclusion, but I went with a feeling that he was attacking

out of desperation and was hoping that I would block knowing the situation. He had land in his hand, and I was able to win the game.

Did I make the right decision? Well, apparently, but he could have just as easily had a Lightning Bolt and I would have been on the wrong end of that one. There was no right or wrong decision in this case, and if you make the wrong decision then you should record that data and move on. No mistake or wrong decision is worth beating yourself up over. It can only adversely effect you for the remainder of a tournament.

DISTRACTING OPPONENTS

I have developed the way I play a game of **Magic** according to my personality. I feel uncomfortable if I am yelling and screaming trying to distract my opponent. I know that I could never be a professional wrestler, cheerleader, or anything else that required me to be energetic in front of a crowd. I prefer the quiet route. There are some players who consciously use the exact opposite route to victory, however. They want playing them to be the most uncomfortable experience ever. They are the bad boys of **Magic**. Let me walk you through a recent tournament, where the work of the baddest boy in **Magic** history was on display. The scene was the Grand Prix in Atlanta, and the greatest bad boy the **Magic** world has ever known, Mike Long, was there.

I walked into the tournament, and immediately you could hear one group of individuals making the most noise in the tournament. The central figure in that group was Mike Long. He was ranting and raving about some subject, trying to catch people's attention, and as they would walk by he would proclaim, "I am here to wreck all of you. I am going to win this tournament." The individuals in the group would laugh, and the bystanders would walk on. This absolute confidence gives players like Mike an incredible edge. He knows

he is good, and reminds everyone about it so they can never forget it if they play him.

In this tournament I was paired against Mike early on, and he immediately stood up on the table and showed me his toenails he had just painted. Players like myself try to get a few moments of silence before the match to concentrate and focus, and Mike knows that. He does everything he can to distract you and keep your mind on him, not your game.

I think that from the moment of birth to this day, Mike has never stopped talking. During our match he started talking about the weather, the basketball game last night, the girl that just walked by, how he didn't like the shirt I was wearing, the player next to him, and on and on. If you don't talk with him it doesn't matter because he will find someone else to talk with. The judge, the crowd, an imaginary friend, or even to himself. I don't care how disciplined you are, it wears on you after a while.

Mike wears on me whenever I play him. As Gabe Tsang, top eight from last year's Worlds put it, "It is never a fun match, even when you win." During the course of the match, he was getting to me, and during one crucial turn I made a mistake. He let me know about it, yelling "That was the stupidest thing that I ever have seen in my life." It was not quite that bad, but any **Magic** player is going to beat themselves up over the slightest error. Although I was fortunate enough to win the match, Mike "talked" me into a mistake which could have led me to losing the match. I am sure he has gotten many wins in the past using this psychological warfare.

Is it worth it? I am not going to sit here and judge anyone for their style of play. I know Mike does it for a bigger winning percentage, as his friends back home tell me that he is a different guy there. You have to determine the best psychological strategy for your personality, and you also have to cope with what your opponent throws at you.

In summary, the **Magic** Metagame transcends any one area, and includes almost everything you do inside and outside of a tournament. It includes but is not limited to:

- 1 Sizing up the environment
- 2 Choosing the right deck to play
- 3 Networking with players
- 4 Psychological preparation the morning of the Tournament
- 5 Playing technically perfect **Magic**
- 6 Psychological gaming

Could it be? Did someone really open up to multiples of these cards at the Black Lotus Tournament?



MAGIC ETHICS

When I first started playing in **Magic** tournaments, there was a very loose feeling to them. We were there for fun, and while we all wanted to win, it seemed that everyone was fairly well behaved. We each came with our decks, and the cards and skill of the opponent would decide the outcome. The point that I started noticing players acting unethically was when the prizes for tournaments started getting larger.



The first ever Black Lotus tournament in our area was going to be Sealed Deck. Each player was going to receive a Revised starter deck, with a pack of Revised and a pack of Chronicles. The tournament was progressing nicely when rumors started floating around that an incredible deck was there. The person had opened their packs and “luckily” received six Fireballs, two Disintegrates, four Serra Angels, an Ivory Tower, Black Vise, and other assorted goodies. Needless to say I was a little upset, as I knew the print runs could not produce such a **magical** arrangement.

To this day, I have not played in a Sealed Deck tournament where the decks have not been recorded and randomly distributed. That early case made me realize that there were always going to be a few players who felt that they need to go outside the lines in order to achieve victory.

The vast majority of **Magic** players that I have encountered are completely honest. They do not cheat or condone cheating. They value the intellectual integrity of the sport of **Magic** too greatly for that. **Magic** is filled with this type of person, but as the saying goes, it only take one worm to spoil the apple. With that said, there are many

ways to protect yourself from these few worms that might pop up in the next tournament you are in. Here are the many things to keep an eye open for when you are running or participating in a tournament, followed by ways to counteract the unethical behavior you might encounter.

SHUFFLING

During the shuffle there are many things to look for. Some players will stack their land and spells so that they will get the perfect balance when the cards are dealt. Sometimes they will appear to stack their lands in random piles after they have organized them beforehand. The simple way to counteract this is to make sure that you shuffle your opponent’s deck before every match. It seems simple enough, but you would be surprised how many players forget to do this.

When shuffling your opponent’s deck make sure that all of their cards are facing the same direction. A player was recently caught having all of his land facing one direction and his spells facing another. This is a direct violation of the

rules, and if you suspect anything is wrong, please notify a judge of your suspicions immediately.

If your opponent is shuffling your deck and you think that they are trying to get a peek at the deck or arrange your cards in any type of order, have a judge shuffle your deck. The cards should always be face down and never “side shuffled.”

If at any time during the course of a match, there is a card that causes your opponent to shuffle their deck, Tithe, Bad River, Thawing Glaciers, etc., make sure that you are able to shuffle it again before play resumes. The “Thawing Tutor” was so-called because occasionally a player would use Thawing Glacier to get a land and then put a key card on top of the deck for a tutoring effect.

These and all other problems involved with shuffling can be easily resolved by simply taking the necessary time to randomize your opponent’s deck by shuffling it three times before each time they draw.

SEALED DECK

The DCI has done a great job of patrolling the Limited environment by controlling the way Sealed Decks are distributed at major tournaments. Before each of the tournaments, a player receives a deck and records the contents of that deck. There is a 15% chance that they will receive that deck back. This is done so that if a player removes a few good cards from the deck they have the chance of receiving it back. If they add a few cards, they run the risk of giving that deck to an opponent.

In my mind, this had almost completely eliminated the problem of cheating in Sealed Deck. There is no fear that there will be a deck with six fireballs in it again. Still, there are some individuals that try to thwart the system, and will add cards to the deck before or after the decks are redistributed. Any tournament that you attend





should institute a series of random deck checks to keep players on their toes. This will have the side benefit of making sure that players are properly sideboarded. If your tournament organizer does not currently do this, express your concern, and they usually are more than happy to comply.

If you are running a tournament, take the precaution of photocopying the deck lists that are returned to players that receive their own decks. This will prevent them from adding cards to them once they are received. Most of the things that can be done to prevent cheating in Sealed Deck tournaments lie at the feet of the person running the tournament. You are their customer, and by suggesting these means of monitoring cheating will only make for a better environment to play in.

BOOSTER DRAFT

Booster draft is a very hard thing for individuals to monitor, as the packs are not seen by the other competitors. There are a few steps that you can take in order to make sure the draft is fair for all of those participating however.

The first thing to do is make sure that all packs competitors are drafting from are randomly distributed before the draft. If a player brings their own packs, they might have found a way to view the contents of the pack before the draft. Having random packs eliminates this possibility.

During the course of a draft, players often look at their cards while drafting from a pack. What can happen in this situation is that they may replace one of their existing cards with one of the

cards from the new pack, and effectively draft two cards. A player should never touch their cards while handling the pack that they are drafting from. Make sure that the draft is going at the same pace, in order to avoid a player drafting out of order by accident as well. During many casual drafts, packs will back up and honest mistakes can be made. By taking the few extra seconds to have everyone draft at the same time, these problems can be avoided.

One of the most common problems in draft formats is not adding extra cards, but friends or teammates colluding with each other to draft top decks. If two teammates are sitting next to each other, a system could be formed between the two where one player will set the color of the cards he is drafting on the bottom of the pile to give his friend this information. All draft seating should be done randomly, and there should be no communicating during the draft. This is hard to completely monitor, and is up to the judge to enforce.

DECK REGISTRATION

At most major tournaments you are required to register your deck, whether it is a constructed or limited tournament. This prevents players from adding cards to their deck depending on the other decks they see at the tournament. If decks are not registered, several things can happen. The most common of these is players swapping cards in and out of their sideboard depending on who they play. If you have registered your decks, and you suspect something isn't right, simply ask a judge to check your opponent's deck. This is perfectly within your right as a player, but don't take it too far, or you will develop a reputation for doing it just to rile up an opponent.

Another thing that happens while deck registration is occurring is that certain players will develop wandering eyes. They appear to be casually looking at players' cards just out of curiosity. Most of the time this is the case, but do not be the victim of this, innocent or not. Simply

find a corner of a table to seclude yourself, and register your deck as privately as possible. Also make sure that you clearly write out each and every card in your deck, as there is game loss at minimum if you have an incorrect deck list.

SLEEVES AND MARKED CARDS

This is perhaps one of the most common ways people try to bend the rules in tournaments these days. It makes no difference whether the player is playing with sleeves or not, there are ways to mark your cards using either.

If a player is playing with sleeves, you should be aware of a few things. Are their sleeves all facing the same direction? Do some of the sleeves appear to be more worn than others? If you have



any suspicion, contact a judge to inspect your opponent's deck. Most of the time the wear and tear on the sleeves will be a natural occurrence, so do not get too paranoid if you see a scuff on the sleeve. If you feel uncomfortable, ask your opponent to de-sleeve.

The same wear and tear can occur on regular **Magic** cards. A bigger problem with regular cards is the different print runs that **Magic** cards go through. This was most evident at the Pro Tour in Los Angeles in 1997. The format was Rochester Draft, and the DCI handed out land to each player. The regular cards were *Mirage* and *Visions*, but the land handed out to each player was *Ice Age* land. It was easy to tell whenever a player drew a land or a spell, and they could tell the same with your deck.



If you notice different shadings on your opponent's cards, you might ask a judge to check out their deck. Once again, this might be a honest mistake, but if all twenty of their land is from one edition, the creature removal from another, and other spells from yet another, then obviously something is wrong. It is your responsibility to make sure that your own cards aren't from different print runs as well, or you might lose a game because of it.

CARD DRAWING AND MANIPULATION

Drawing extra cards is the most commonly perceived cheating method. The reason for this is that it is easy to count and easy to catch. There are simple steps you can take to prevent this from happening to you. The first is to simply have your opponent count out each of their cards in their opening hand. By doing this you can avoid any potential mistakes that might be honestly made of cards sticking together. If your opponent took a Paris Mulligan, make sure that one card less is drawn.

Players drawing extra cards can be difficult to spot if the player is proficient at it. A colleague of mine who does not play **Magic** once demonstrated to me how he could draw extra poker cards without me detecting it. Time after time he was drawing cards and even though I was closely watching them, I could not catch him. It is hard to watch every time an opponent draws, so if during the match there appears to be some discrepancy in cards, ask a judge to come over and they will count out the situation.

If your opponent forgets to draw a card for some reason, be sure to remind them to do so. This is important because, besides being a rule, they might be setting you up for a fall later on. They can then call a judge over and accuse you of drawing too many cards. This can put you in a



horrible position, and could end up worse than having an opponent cheat against you.

I have heard about players drawing off their sideboard, their graveyard, and even their opponents deck! What prompts a player to this is beyond me, but you need to take the responsibility of monitoring your opponent at all times. You should be doing this anyway to see if they are giving off any signs that might tip you off to the contents of their hand.

Mana

Mana is the source from which all **Magic** spells are cast, so it is obviously a place where things can go wrong. I am not a cynical individual, so I believe that most mistakes that are made in **Magic** are honest ones. It is a complicated game, and since we are human beings, we are going to mess up every once in a while. This is even more true with mana, as our concentration seems to be concentrated on the spell we are going to cast, or our opponents creatures. Still, there are a few things that we can do in order to keep both sides

on a fair playing field.

One of the most common mistakes is made when a player forgets to take damage from a Pain land. I have done this before, and I can tell you it is easy to overlook. What both sides need to do is



be very aware of whenever a Pain land is in play. If a player forgets to take a damage simply remind him to do so.

The same thing can happen with Depletion lands. We get so used to untapping every turn that it can be very easy not to. Bring a stack of counters to every tournament, and if you or your opponent is playing with Depletion lands, simply put a counter on the land to remind them of the fact that they need to wait an extra turn to untap.

Other areas can be a little more difficult to judge if your opponent is playing fairly. Some other things to look for in this area include an opponent laying two mana a turn, underpaying a spell, or tapping mana to cast a spell that isn't that color. This type of rule breaking simply takes attention to catch.

Untap and Upkeep

I have had opponents forget to pay costs during upkeep several times, and never before have I thought they were cheating. Forgetting to pay a blue mana for a Waterspout or Stasis simply meant that they were about to lose a card. If a player is cheating, they are going to be running a big risk, as almost everyone is hoping that they are going to forget to pay the upkeep anyway. If they do forget, make sure they bury the card as they have made a mistake one way or another.

"Questionable" Questions

Sometimes, a player will not cheat outright, but will try to bend ethics in their favor by fooling you. This sort of dialogue can include hassling questions, such as:

"Are you done?"

"Can we enter Damage Prevention now?"

Although this is not cheating outright, it is the domain of sleazy players to rush their opponents through phases. If your opponent ever asks any such question, tell them "NO" immediately as a matter of principle, and take a long look at the board and your hand. Chances are they are hoping you are missing something, such as a fast effect, or even your entire turn in some instances. Two particularly sneaky gambits are listed below.

"Can I play a fast effect now?"

Say 'no'. Take a look at the board. Since this trick will be used when you are the active player, the opponent will use this to try to get you to skip

your own fast effects phase, usually in combat. If you answer "yes" to this, they can declare no effects, and end your phase. Don't fall for it.

"If you show me 'X', I'll concede."

Ignore it. Never show your opponent your hand unless a game mechanic dictates it. They are under no obligation to concede, even if you show them card "X". This is just a ploy to see your hand.

SUMMARY

In the end, don't be too paranoid when dealing with these issues. Tournament **Magic** is full of outstanding individuals that play completely honest games, and they comprise 99% of **Magic** players. Take the time to notice what your opponent is doing, and contact a judge if you feel that anything is out of the ordinary. You can't get into trouble for getting clarification from a judge. Above all, make sure that you play within the rules, and stand for something more than winning or losing. After the cards are gathered up, we ourselves know if we truly won or lost.

Appendix I: Mana Curves

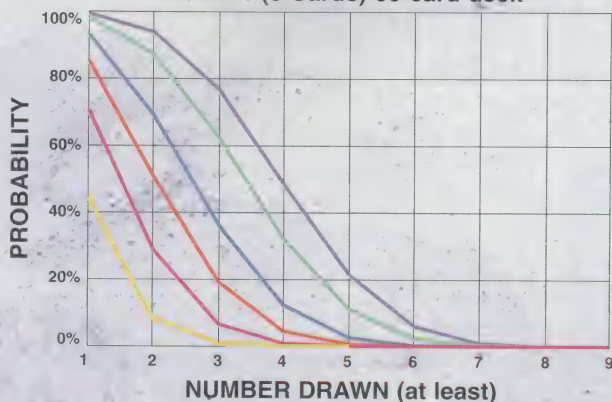
One of the most common oversights committed by players when constructing a deck concerns the inclusion of a natural land ratio appropriate to the core concept. Get the mana ratio wrong — and you might not live to regret it.

These graphs were created by Henry Stern of Wizards R&D team to show the probability of drawing a specific card in a given number of turns. They are included here as a guide when deciding on the number of lands to include in your deck.

The colored lines correspond to the number of a specific card included in a 60-card deck. The x-axis refers to the number of cards drawn while the y-axis indicates the percentage chance of drawing (at least) that many cards.

For example: you have included sixteen Swamps in your deck, and wish to know the probability of drawing at least three in your first draw (8 cards). Refer to the first table and find the point

TURN 1 (8 Cards) 60-card deck

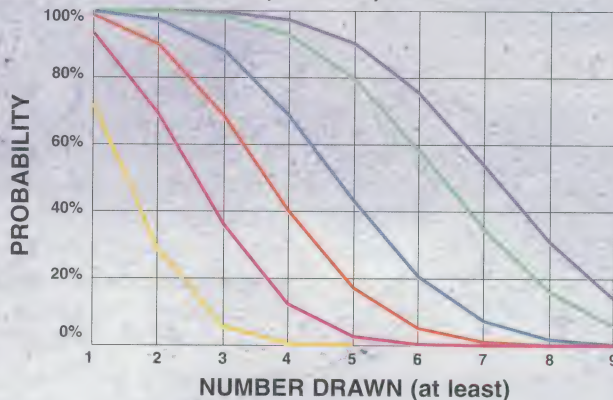


NUMBER OF CARDS INCLUDED IN THE 60-CARD DECK

Line	No.
Yellow	4
Magenta	8
Red	12
Blue	16
Green	22
Purple	26

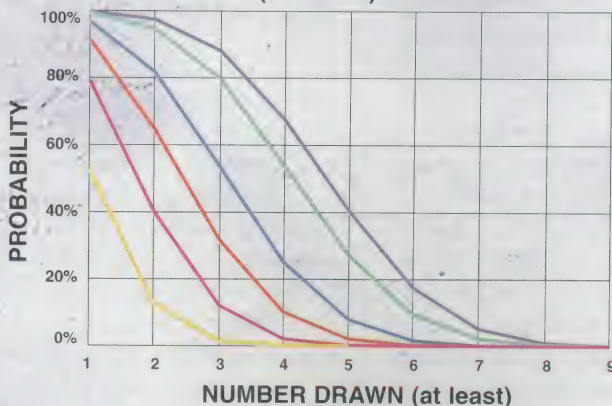
where the blue line (16 cards) intersects the vertical line "3". Cross referencing this with the horizontal axis, you find that there is roughly a 36 percent chance that you will draw at least three of your sixteen swamps on your first turn.

TURN 9 (16 Cards) 60-card deck



Knowing the odds can give you a definite edge. But a word of caution is necessary before you are swept away by the magic of probability. These numbers are representative of a large number of games. A single game can, and will, yield some quite unexpected results; nothing is ever guaranteed but if you use these graphs as a guide, you should greatly minimise the risk of mana blight.

TURN 3 (10 Cards) 60-card deck



Appendix II: Popular Tournament Decks

This is a list of decks that are currently popular, or have been for some time, in the tournament environment.

TYPE II

1. Prosperous Bloom

4 x Cadaverous Bloom
4 x Squandered Resources
4 x Natural Balance
4 x Infernal Contract
4 x Meditate
2 x Prosperity
1 x Drain Life
4 x Impulse
4 x Vampiric Tutor
3 x Power Sink
2 x Abeyance
4 x City of Brass
4 x Gemstone Mine
6 x Forest
5 x Swamp
4 x Island
1 x Plains

Sideboard:

1 x Mountain
3 x Pyroblast
4 x Wall of Blossoms
2 x Abeyance
1 x Power Sink
1 x Whispers of the Muse
1 x Elephant Grass
2 x Emerald Charm

2. "Deadguy" Red

4 x Mogg Fanatic
4 x Jackal Pup
3 x Goblin Digging Team
4 x Mogg Flunky
3 x Ironclaw Orc
3 x Fireslinger
4 x Ball Lightning
4 x Shock
4 x Incinerate
3 x Fireblast
3 x Cursed Scroll
17 x Mountain
4 x Wasteland

Sideboard:

4 x Pyroblast
3 x Thunderbolt
3 x Dwarven Miner
1 x Cursed Scroll
2 x Serrated Biskelion
2 x Nevinyrral's Disk

3. Five-Color Blue

4 x Whispers of the Muse
4 x Impulse
2 x Gaea's Blessing
4 x Wall of Blossoms
4 x Counterspell
2 x Disenchant
2 x Dissipate
1 x Uktabi Orangutan
4 x Dismiss
4 x Wrath of God
3 x Gerrard's Wisdom
2 x Fireball
1 x Earthquake
4 x Reflecting Pool
3 x Island
1 x Undiscovered Paradise
3 x Gemstone Mine
1 x Svyelunite Temple
1 x Forest
1 x Plains
1 x Vec Township
2 x Thalakos Lowlands
2 x Adarkar Wastes
1 x Quicksand
1 x Wasteland
1 x City of Brass
1 x Flood Plain

Sideboard:

3 x Hydroblast
2 x Warmth
2 x CoP: Red
1 x Phyrexian Furnace
1 x Null Rod
1 x Teferi's Realm
1 x Mangara's Blessing
2 x Pyroblast
2 x Lobotomy

4. Four-Color White Weenie

2 x Nomad en-Kor
2 x Warrior en-Kor
4 x Soltari Priest
4 x White Knight
3 x Order of the White Shield
3 x Man o' War
3 x Mana Leak
3 x Disenchant
2 x Terror
2 x Firestorm
2 x Armageddon
2 x Empyrial Armor
4 x Tithe
4 x Mox Diamond
2 x Adarkar Wastes
3 x Gemstone Mine
1 x Undiscovered Paradise
3 x City of Brass
7 x Plains
4 x Wasteland

Sideboard:

2 x Sleight of Mind
4 x Pyroblast
2 x CoP: Red
2 x Dwarven Miner
1 x Disenchant
2 x Aura of Silence
2 x Terror

5. Druid Death

4 x Granger Guildmage
 4 x Birds of Paradise
 4 x Wall of Blossoms
 4 x Hermit-Druid
 4 x Spike Feeder
 4 x Uktabi Orangutan
 4 x Nekrataal
 4 x Lhurgoyf
 4 x Living Death
 1 x Hurricane
 4 x Reflecting Pool
 4 x City of Brass
 3 x Gemstone Mine
 1 x Undiscovered Paradise
 1 x Volrath's Stronghold
 7 x Forest
 3 x Swamp

Sideboard:

3 x Tranquil Domain
 3 x Emerald Charm
 2 x Lobotomy
 2 x Dread of Night
 1 x Volrath's Stronghold
 1 x Sylvan Library
 3 x Pyroblast

6. Counter-Phoenix

4 x Shock
 4 x Incinerate
 2 x Earthquake
 4 x Counterspell
 3 x Dissipate
 4 x Dismiss
 4 x Impulse
 4 x Whispers of the Muse
 4 x Nevinyrral's Disk
 2 x Shard Phoenix
 13 x Island
 8 x Mountain
 4 x Reflecting Pool

Sideboard:

3 x Quicksand
 3 x Wasteland
 3 x Pyroblast
 2 x Hydroblast
 2 x Disrupt
 2 x Shatter

7. Black Speed Weenie

4 x Sarcomancy
 3 x Sewer Rat
 4 x Black Knight
 4 x Knight of Stromgald
 4 x Dauthi Horror
 4 x Dauthi Slayer
 4 x Bad Moon
 3 x Hidden Horror
 3 x Necropotence
 2 x Unholy Strength
 4 x Dark Ritual
 4 x Wasteland
 17 x Swamp

Sideboard:

4 x Gloom
 3 x Perish
 1 x Necro
 2 x Coercion
 3 x Terror
 2 x Barrow Ghoul

8. Green/Blue

8 x Forest
 2 x Gemstone Mine
 4 x City of Brass
 3 x Undiscovered Paradise
 2 x Brushland
 1 x Llanowar Elf
 4 x Wall of Roots
 4 x Birds of Paradise
 4 x Maro
 4 x Jolreal's Centaur
 1 x Uktabi Orangutan
 4 x Ophidian
 4 x Mana Leak
 4 x Tradewind Rider
 4 x Incinerate
 3 x Disenchant
 4 x Armageddon

9. Counter-Sliver

4 x Muscle Sliver
 4 x Crystalline Sliver
 4 x Winged Sliver
 1 x Victual Sliver
 2 x Hibernation Sliver
 4 x Man o' War
 3 x Legacy's Allure
 4 x Portent
 4 x Counterspell
 2 x Mana Leak
 1 x Kaervek's Torch
 1 x Armageddon
 2 x Uktabi Orangutan
 2 x Disenchant
 7 x Island
 2 x Undiscovered Paradise
 3 x Gemstone Mine
 3 x City of Brass
 3 x Adarkar Wastes
 2 x Reflecting Pool
 1 x Volrath's Stronghold
 1 x Wasteland

Sideboard:

3 x Hydroblast
 2 x Disrupt
 2 x Uktabi Orangutan
 2 x Winter Orb
 1 x Wrath of God
 1 x Lobotomy
 2 x Tranquil Domain
 2 x Propaganda

10. Control Necro

4 x Necropotence
 4 x Bottle Gnomes
 3 x Nightmare
 4 x Funeral Charm
 4 x Diabolic Edict
 4 x Stupor
 3 x Agonizing Memories
 4 x Nevinyrral's Disk
 2 x Spinning Darkness
 4 x Drain Life
 2 x Dark Ritual
 3 x Quicksand
 1 x Volrath's Stronghold
 18 x Swamp

Sideboard:

3 x Perish
 3 x Dread of Night
 3 x Gloom
 2 x Nekrataal
 1 x Phyrexian Furnace
 3 x Wasteland

11. Druid Misery

4 x Hermit Druid
 4 x Lhurgoyf
 4 x Revenant
 4 x Birds of Paradise
 4 x Wall of Blossoms
 4 x Wall of Roots
 2 x Spike Feeder
 4 x Haunting Misery
 4 x Shallow Grave
 2 x Vampiric Tutor
 4 x City of Brass
 4 x Gemstone Mine
 4 x Reflecting Pool
 4 x Pine Barrens
 2 x Undiscovered Paradise
 2 x Ebon Stronghold
 2 x Havenwood Battleground

Sideboard:

4 x Pyroblast
 4 x Abeyance
 2 x Spike Feeder
 1 x Bottle Gnomes
 2 x Chaos Charm
 2 x Vampiric Tutor

12. "Five Color Kastle"

4 x Wall of Blossoms
 4 x Wall of Roots
 4 x Birds of Paradise
 4 x Living Death
 4 x Intuition
 3 x Tradewind Rider
 3 x Armageddon
 3 x Maro
 3 x Fallen Angel
 3 x Spike Feeder
 3 x Firestorm
 4 x City of Brass
 4 x Gemstone Mine
 2 x Underground River
 2 x Undiscovered Paradise
 11 x Forest

Sideboard:

4 x Pyroblast
 4 x Uktabi Orangutan
 3 x Emerald Charm
 3 x Cloudchaser Eagle
 1 x Spike Feeder

13. "Peaches, and Stuff"

4 x Spike Feeder (Peaches)
 4 x Uktabi Orangutan
 4 x Wall Of Roots
 3 x Hermit Druid
 3 x Tradewind Rider
 1 x Silver Wyvern
 2 x Nekrataal
 3 x Cloudchaser Eagle

 1 x Bottle Gnome
 4 x Counterspell
 2 x Intuition
 4 x Impulse
 4 x Living Death
 1 x Corpse Dance
 4 x City Of Brass
 4 x Reflecting pool
 2 x Undiscovered Paradise
 1 x Skyshroud Forest
 1 x Gemstone Mine
 1 x Underground River
 3 x Island
 3 x Forest
 2 x Swamp

Sideboard:

3 x Pyroblast
 2 x Light of Day
 1 x Disenchant
 2 x Energy Flux
 2 x Phyrexian Furnace
 2 x Gloom
 2 x Bottle Gnomes

14. Counterhell

4 x Counterspell
 4 x Power Sink
 4 x Memory Lapse
 2 x Dissipate
 1 x Desertion
 1 x Force Spike
 4 x Dismiss
 4 x Impulse
 4 x Whispers of the Muse
 3 x Nevinyrral's Disk
 2 x Legacy's Allure
 1 x Capsize
 1 x Rainbow Efreet
 19 x Island
 4 x Quicksand
 2 x Stalking Stones
 1 x Ice Floe

Sideboard:

4 x Chill
 3 x Hydroblast
 2 x Dream Tides
 2 x Interdict
 1 x Evacuation
 1 x Ice Floe
 1 x Disrupting Scepter
 1 x Steal Artifact

15. Living Nature:

6 x Swamp
 6 x Forest
 3 x Undiscovered Paradise
 3 x Gemstone Mine
 2 x City of Brass
 1 x Volrath's Stronghold
 1 x Reflecting Pool
 3 x Birds of Paradise
 4 x Granger Guildmage
 4 x Wall of Blossoms
 4 x Spike Feeder
 4 x Uktabi Orangutan
 4 x Nekrataal
 4 x Living Death
 2 x Corpse Dance
 2 x Fallen Angel
 3 x Dauthi Horror
 3 x Tradewind Riders
 1 x Goblin Bombardment

Sideboard

3 x Pyroblast
 2 x Dread of the Night
 2 x Lobotomy
 2 x Disenchant
 3 x Ebony Charm
 2 x Bottle Gnomes
 1 x Goblin Bombardment

16. Tradewind

4 x Propaganda
 4 x Awakening
 4 x Tradewind Rider
 4 x Capsize
 4 x Counterspell
 4 x Suk'Ata Firewalker
 4 x Wall of Blossoms
 2 x Uktabi Orangutan
 3 x Dissipate
 2 x Impulse
 2 x Birds of Paradise
 2 x Quicksand
 2 x Reflecting Pool
 1 x Undiscovered Paradise
 3 x Skyshroud Forest
 6 x Forest
 10 x Island

Sideboard

4 x Chill
 3 x Legacy's Allure
 2 x Emerald Charm
 2 x Tranquil Domains
 2 x Uktabi Orangutan
 2 x Scragnoth

17. Garden

4 x Vineyards
 4 x Wall of Roots
 4 x Birds of Paradise
 4 x Spike Feeders
 4 x Bottle Gnomes
 3 x Uktabi Orangutan
 2 x Sylvan Library
 2 x Gaea's Blessing
 4 x Cursed Scroll
 4 x Ensnaring Bridge
 2 x Jester's Cap
 2 x Enlightened Tutor
 2 x Disenchant
 10 x Forest
 4 x Gemstone Mine
 3 x Wasteland
 2 x Brushland

Sideboard:

2 x CoP: Red
 2 x Lifeforce
 3 x Jinxed Idol
 1 x Uktabi Orangutan
 1 x Phyrexian Furnace
 3 x Pyroblast
 1 x Disenchant
 2 x Cursed Totem

18. Five Colors Black

3 x Uktabi Orangutan
 2 x Necratog
 3 x Dauthi Horror
 3 x Fallen Askari
 4 x Black Knight
 3 x Erg Raiders
 2 x Nekratal
 4 x Bottle Gnomes
 3 x Diabolic Edict
 3 x Incinerate
 2 x Shock
 1 x Earthquake
 1 x Goblin Bombardmet
 1 x Cursed Scroll
 2 x Disenchant
 11 x Swamps
 3 x Undiscovered Paradise
 2 x City of Brass
 2 x Gemstone Mine
 1 x Sulfurous Spring
 3 x Wasteland
 1 x Volrath's Stronghold

Sideboard

3 x Dread Of Night
 3 x Perish
 2 x CoP: Red
 3 x Pyroblast
 2 x Mind Bend
 2 x Scragnoth

19. Black Fire

10 x Swamps
 4 x Mountains
 4 x Sulfurous Springs
 2 x Undiscovered Paradise
 4 x Black Knight
 3 x Nekrataal
 4 x Shadow Gildmage
 4 x Suq'ata Lancers
 4 x Bottle Gnomes
 3 x Dauthi Horror
 4 x Incinerate
 4 x Diabolic Edict
 2 x Dark Ritual
 4 x Cursed Scroll
 2 x Living Death
 1 x Firestorm
 1 x Goblin Bombardment

Sideboard

4 x Perish
 4 x Coercion
 4 x Pyroblast
 3 x Adarkar Wastes

20. Green Creature

4 x Rogue Elephant
 4 x Llanowar Elves
 4 x Quirion Ranger
 4 x Wall of Blossoms
 4 x Muscle Sliver
 2 x Harvest Wurm
 2 x Fallow Wurm
 4 x Jolrael's Centaur
 4 x Uktabi Orangutan
 4 x Stampeding Wildebeest
 4 x Giant Growth
 4 x Cursed Scroll
 16 x Forests

Sideboard:

4 x Spike Feeders
 2 x Overrun
 4 x Tranquil Domain
 2 x Serrated Biskellion
 1 x Crumble

EXTENDED DECKS

21. Five Colours Green

4 x Birds of Paradise
 4 x Granger Guildmage
 2 x Quirion Ranger
 4 x Wall of Blossoms
 4 x Uktabi Orangutan
 4 x Jolreal's Centaur
 2 x Maro
 3 x Armageddon
 3 x Incinerate
 3 x Tradewind Rider
 3 x Mana Leak
 1 x Man o' War
 2 x Terror
 1 x Derelor
 3 x City of Brass
 3 x Undiscovered Paradise
 2 x Gemstone Mines
 12 x Forest

Sideboard:

2 x Pyroblast
 3 x Firestorm
 3 x Chill
 3 x Disenchant
 3 x Winter Orb
 1 x Disrupt

22. Tradewind Prison

4 Birds of Paradise
 4 Quirion Ranger
 4 Wall of Roots
 4 x Uktabi Orangutan
 4 x Man o' War
 4 x Tradewind Rider
 4 x Counterspell
 2 x Disrupt
 3 x Impulse
 1 x Disenchant
 4 x Armageddon
 3 x Winter Orbs
 2 x Refelected pool
 1 x Gemstone Mine
 3 x Undiscovered Paradise

1 x Adarkar Wastes
 5 x Island
 7 x Forest

Sideboard:

2 x Memory Lapse
 3 x Emerald Charm
 1 x Scragnoth
 1 x Winter Orb
 3 x Disenchant
 4 x Hydroblast
 1 x Chill

1. Whitish Weenie

4 x Land Tax
 3 x Scroll Rack
 4 x Savannah Lion
 4 x Soltari Priest
 4 x White Knight
 2 x Gorilla Shaman
 4 x Lightning Bolt
 4 x Swords to Plowshares
 2 x Firestorm
 3 x Disenchant
 4 x Tithe
 4 x Mox Diamond
 4 x Plateau
 1 x Savannah
 8 x Plains
 1 x Kjeldoran Outpost
 4 x Wastelands

Sideboard:

2 x Gaea's Blessing
 1 x Disenchant
 3 x Aura of Silence
 2 x Suleiman's Legacy
 2 x Honorable Passage
 2 x Sand Golem

2. Discard Deck

4 x Hymn to Tourach
 3 x Drain Life
 3 x Diabolical Edict
 3 x Funeral Charm
 3 x Bottomless Pit
 2 x Stupor
 1 x Demonic Consultation
 4 x Dark Ritual
 4 x The Rack
 4 x Cursed Scroll
 4 x Steel Golem
 3 x Ensnaring Bridge
 4 x Scrublands
 4 x Wasteland
 11 x Swamp
 2 x Bad River
 1 x Rocky Tar Pit

Sideboard:

3 x Disenchant
 2 x Hanna's Custody
 3 x Spinning Darkness
 2 x Stench of Evil
 2 x Forsaken Wastes
 1 x Touchstone
 2 x Dread of Night

3. Green Speed Deck

4 x Fyndhorn Elves
 1 x Llanowar Elves
 2 x Wild Growth
 4 x Erhnam Djinn
 2 x Uktabi Orangutan
 4 x Wall of Blossoms
 4 x Winter's Grasp
 4 x Thermokarst
 3 x Creeping Mold
 4 x Cursed Scroll
 2 x Serrated Arrows
 15 x Forest
 4 x Wasteland
 4 x Mishra's Factory

Sideboard:

2 x Lifeforce
 2 x Spike Feeder
 2 x Emerald Charm
 2 x Choke
 2 x Uktabi Orangutan
 2 x City of Solitude
 2 x Hail Storm

4. Sligh/Geeba Deck

4 x Lightning Bolt
 4 x Mogg Fanatic
 2 x Hammer of Bogardan
 4 x Ironclaw Orcs
 4 x Ball Lightning
 4 x Jackal Pup
 4 x Incinerate
 4 x Fireblast
 2 x Viashino Sandstalker
 2 x Dwarven Miner
 4 x Shock
 4 x Wasteland
 18 x Mountain

Sideboard:

2 x Pyrokinesis
 2 x Shatterstorm
 4 x Anarchy
 3 x Blood Moon
 4 x Ankh of Mishra

5. White Weenie

4 x White Knight
 2 x Soltari Monk
 4 x Soltari Priest
 3 x Phyrexian War Beast
 3 x Empyrial Armor
 4 x Disenchant
 3 x Scroll Rack
 4 x Tithe
 4 x Land Tax
 4 x Savannah Lions
 4 x Lightning Bolt
 4 x Swords to Plowshares
 1 x Firestorm
 10 x Plains
 2 x Undiscovered Paradise
 4 x Plateau

Sideboard:

3 x Serrated Arrows
 3 x Aura of Silence
 2 x Firestorm
 2 x Honorable Passage
 2 x Suleiman's Legacy
 3 x Blood Moon

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



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